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ABSTRACT

The need for systems identifying workplace competency profiles was examined through telephone interviews with a nationwide sample of 56 individuals in Australia's electrical industry: 27 employers not directly involved in training; 23 individuals directly involved in training; and 6 apprentices, trainees, and employees. Although competency profiles were generally used only by larger enterprises, several small employers stated that they would use competency profiles if they were given model profiles or assistance where needed. The employers saw three main areas of use for competency profiles: specifying jobs, selecting employees, and training and assessing employees. Although only a few training providers have had an opportunity to work with enterprise-developed workplace competency profiles, most welcomed the concept of such profiles. Training providers felt that competency profiles would be useful for analyzing training needs in the workplace, selecting appropriate modules of training, monitoring and assessing employee workplace performance, and developing curricula. No employees, trainees, or prospective employees had ever seen a workplace competency profile; however, most said that profiles would be useful. (Thirty-three tables/figures are included. Appended are the following: an issue paper for focus groups; issues and procedures; interviewee materials; model workplace and employee competency profiles; 56 references; and acknowledgments.) (MN)

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INDICATORS OF COMPETENCY:

Profiling employees and the workplace

JOHN SAUNDERS

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Indicators of competency: Profiling employees and the workplace

JOHN SAUNDERS

February 1998

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1 Introduction

1.1 Broad aims of the project

This report is based on a project conducted by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research into *Indicators of workplace competence*. The original aims of the project were:

- to investigate the need for systems which identify workplace competency profiles from the point of view of industry, enterprises, individuals, training providers, industry training advisory bodies, and State/Territory training authorities
- to investigate how those involved in the training market should deal with the relationship between training and indicators of workplace competence
- to investigate what influences employees, trainees and students to seek various training options, qualifications and experience
- to determine the extent of the relationship between indicators of workplace competence and trainees' influences, and whether there are any signs of change in this relationship

This was to involve an analysis of how industries and enterprises perceive:

- formal off-job education/training and associated qualifications
- industry-based records of competency
- formal on-job training, and
- work experience

as indicative of workplace competence and, therefore, the purposes which competency profiles should serve.

The original brief was to investigate several industries. However, when it became evident that this would considerably exceed budget constraints, a decision was taken to restrict it to one industry. The electrical industry was chosen for reasons which are outlined under *choosing an industry sample* in chapter 3.

1.2 Other specific aims

As the project progressed, it became apparent that the primary focus of the research should be on workplace competency profiles and that the most useful research outcomes for industry would be insight into:

- what workplace competency profiles were likely to be used for
- who they should target
- what they should consist of
- what benefits might be gained from their use
- what problems might be encountered in implementing and using them

This report aims to provide insight into these matters. In addition, it is hoped that those who read it will be encouraged to look at how the concept of workplace competency profiles (and related employee competency profiles) could be applied in their own situation. Whilst the research focussed on the electrical industry, there seems little reason why the majority of outcomes could not be generalised to other industries.

1.3 A quick-find guide (for those who don't have much time)

The following guide has been compiled to help readers wishing to use this report for specific purposes to quickly find the relevant sections.

Understanding the concepts of workplace and employee competency profiles

Readers who would like to gain better understanding of workplace and employee competency profiles should read chapter 2 which defines and describes these concepts.

Developing and using workplace and employee competency profiles

Those wishing to develop and use workplace and employee competency profiles will find valuable information in Chapters 7 and 8.

Recommendations for industry implementation of workplace and employee competency profiles.

Chapter 8 contains recommendations for implementation of workplace and employee competency profiles in an industry.

The questions asked and the issues which prompted them

An overview of the questions asked will be found in chapter 5 and copies of the questionnaires in appendix 11.2. A copy of the issues paper drawn up at the beginning of the project can be found in appendix 11.1.

Interviewee responses summarised and discussed

For a summary and discussion of the responses of persons interviewed for this project, readers should go to chapter 6.

Interviewee responses in detail

Responses of interviewees to each issue canvassed in this project are recorded in detail in chapters 9 and 10.

Research methodology and the survey sample

Readers interested in the methodology followed in this research will find details in chapter 3. If details of the survey sample are required, they can be found in chapter 4.

2 Workplace and employee competency profiles defined

2.1 Competency defined

To perform a work task, a person must have:

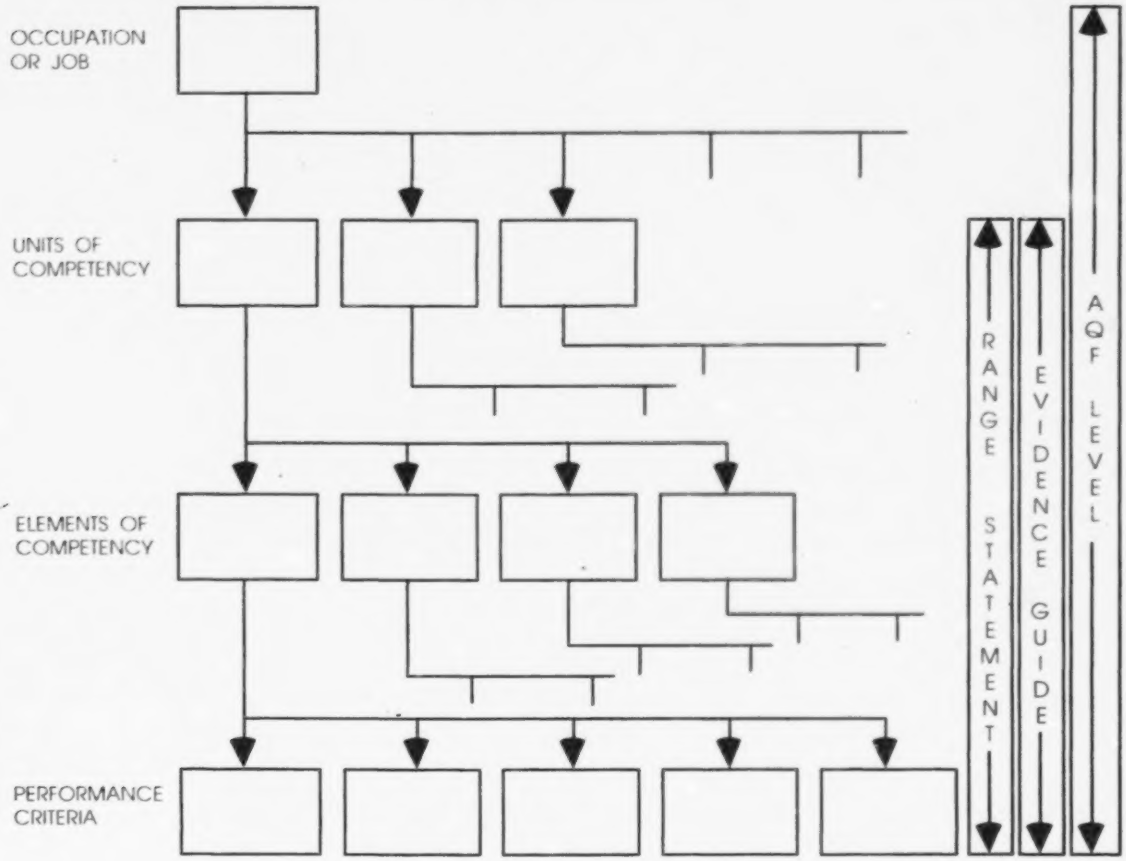
- knowledge about the task and how to do it
- the skills to actually perform the task
- the attitudes, such as initiative and commitment, needed to perform the task satisfactorily
- adequate physical resources (equipment, tools, etc.) to permit the task to be carried out

A suitable combination of these four will enable the person to perform a particular task in a competent manner. The combination of the first three (knowledge, skills and attitudes) is referred to as a competency. When a person has the required knowledge, skills and attitudes they are said to possess that competency.

Individual competencies are usually referred to as units of competence. To make them easier to apply, each unit is broken down into elements of competence with accompanying performance criteria. Range statements and evidence guides may also be provided to help explain how these concepts should be used. Figure 2.1.1 shows how they go together to make up a unit of competence and how units of competence combine to make up a job.

It was noted that some interviewees tended to interpret and refer to competencies rather narrowly as skills. Unless stated otherwise, this report will use the definition described above, in which competency consists of a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Figure 2.1.1: Diagrammatic representation of a competency


OCCUPATION OR JOB
UNITS OF COMPETENCY
ELEMENTS OF COMPETENCY
PERFORMANCE CRITERIA
RANGE STATEMENT
EVIDENCE GUIDE
AQF LEVEL

2.2 Competency profiles: Several types

In the context of this report, a *profile* is a concise description of a set of characteristics relating to either a person or the work a person performs. Extending this definition a *competency profile*, therefore, is a concise description of either a set of competencies a person possesses or a set of competencies required for work that a person performs.

From preliminary discussions and focus groups, there appeared to be several types of competency profiles applicable in the workplace:

- a profile of generic competencies expected of an employee in a particular stream or discipline within an industry sector
- a profile of competencies needed for a particular position or job in an enterprise
- a profile of competencies needed for a particular work task forming part of a job in an enterprise
- a profile of competencies possessed by an individual

The first three are similar to each other, only varying in their breadth of focus. They specify what is required—what a person would be expected to do. In this report, they will be referred to as *workplace competency profiles*.

The fourth type applies to the individual. It specifies what a person can actually do and is not necessarily related to a particular line of work. This type of profile will be referred to as an *employee competency profile*.

There seem to be no reasons why these four types cannot co-exist. Indeed, they appear to complement each other—so that, for example, an individual's *employee competency profile* could be matched against a *workplace competency profile* to assist in selection for employment.

2.3 Workplace competency profiles

As just outlined, a *workplace competency profile* is a term used to identify a set of competencies required for a particular job or work task (in an enterprise) or, more generically, an occupation (in an industry). It defines the knowledge, skills and attitudes an employer expects an employee to have so as to be able to do a particular job.

A workplace competency profile may be formally stated on paper or it may be relatively informal—like a series of requirements to be covered in interviews for a job, or perhaps just the requirements specified in a job advertisement.

Workplace competency profiles can serve various purposes. For example, they may be used to:

- assist employers in allocating tasks in the workplace or in selecting suitable applicants for a job by enabling them to match individuals' knowledge, skills and attitudes with those required for the task or job
- assist individuals in assessing their suitability for a particular job by comparing their competencies (comprising knowledge, skills and attitudes) with those required for the job,
- assist individuals in planning their education and training to meet the requirements of the types of employment they will be seeking
- assist training providers in designing educational and vocational training programs to meet the needs of the workplace
- assist individuals and others to assess competency levels for determining rates of pay

The focus groups conducted for this project favoured the concept of a workplace competency profile which was based on competencies corresponding with those specified in industry competency standards. For the purpose of the project a sample workplace competency profile (figure 2.3.1) was developed. This was based on draft national generic competency standards which were being developed for the electrical industry.

Figure 2.3.1: Sample workplace competency profile developed for the project

Sample workplace competency profile: ELECTRICAL MECHANIC

	Competency	**Performance requirements**
1	Communicate clearly and effectively in the workplace.	Understand oral and written instructions and, where necessary, relay them clearly to others. Report clearly (orally or in writing) on job progress, difficulties encountered, special action taken. Communicate effectively and courteously with customers regarding the work being performed.
2	Perform workplace calculations.	Perform routine workplace calculations such as determination of maximum demand, length of cable run, cable size, type/size of switch or fuse, and estimation of voltage drop.
3	Cultural understanding.	Respect the rights and views of co-workers and customers from other cultures.
4	Work with others as part of a team.	Work co-operatively with others by accepting decisions of the work group, sharing work tasks and taking responsibility for particular aspects of the work.
5	Plan and organise routine work.	Determine types and quantities of materials required. Ensure necessary materials and tools are on hand when required. Schedule work tasks so as to complete jobs efficiently.
6	Collect, organise and analyse information.	Gather and organise work-related information and maintain work records. Interpret manuals, technical information, plans, drawings, codes of practice, job specifications, electrical standards and quality assurance requirements.
7	Awareness of, and ability to use, up-to-date technology.	Be aware of currently available technological equipment, materials and processes and apply them appropriately on the job. (e.g. residual current devices)
8	Work independently.	Work independently and reliably with little or no supervision, when necessary.
9	Use initiative.	Develop and implement own strategies to deal with problems as they arise.
10	Occupational health and safety.	Understand and apply all relevant OH&S codes of practice and procedures including: hazard and risk assessment, responsibility for duty of care, isolation procedures.
11	Diagnose faults in apparatus and associated basic circuits.	Diagnose faults in apparatus and associated basic circuits[1] including wiring, piping, ducting, components, controls, appliances (single and three phase) and lighting.
12	Repair faults in apparatus and associated basic circuits.	Repair faults in apparatus and associated basic circuits[1] including wiring, piping, ducting, components, controls, appliances (single and three phase) and lighting.
13	Transport and handle electrical materials.	Transport and handle electrical tools, materials and equipment safely and efficiently—both to and from the job, and on the worksite.
14	Assemble, work from, and dismantle scaffolding.	Assemble, work from, and dismantle the various types of scaffolding used in the electrical industry to gain access to electrical equipment. Understand and follow relevant OH&S procedures and codes of practice, regarding proximity of power lines and working at heights.
15	Install wiring enclosures, cable support systems, cables and accessories.	Install wiring systems including cables, enclosures and accessories[2] for power, measurement, control and communications.
16	Install and connect fixed wired electrical apparatus.	Install and connect fixed wired single-phase and three-phase apparatus, including supply, controls, and appliances and lighting.
17	Test apparatus and associated basic circuits.	Test apparatus and associated basic circuits[1] and components to ensure safety and integrity. Apparatus to include supply, controls, and appliances (single phase and three phase) and lighting.
18	Undertake commissioning procedures.	Undertake commissioning procedures of apparatus and associated basic circuits[1] and components to comply with predetermined parameters. Apparatus to include supply, controls, and appliances (single phase and three phase) and lighting.
19	Maintain apparatus and associated basic circuits.	Undertake routine maintenance of apparatus and associated basic circuits[1] including wiring, piping, ducting, components, controls, appliances (single and three phase) and lighting.

---

[1] basic circuit: a single circuit with a single outlet which may be controlled by one or more devices.

[2] accessories include: switches, fuses, plugs, lamp holders, adapters and ceiling roses.

Of course, the usefulness of the concepts will be dependent on the type and quality of information the workplace competency profiles contain—two of the issues touched on in this investigation.

A workplace competency profile may be similar in some respects to a job description—since they both refer to things a person is expected to do in a job. However, they differ in that a job description usually focusses on the *responsibilities of the individual in performing the job* (such as, 'responsible to production manager for keeping all electrical equipment in bottling plant fully operational'). Whereas the workplace competency profile focusses on the *competencies the individual must possess to do the job* (such as, 'ability to maintain apparatus and associated basic circuits'). As one interviewee from a large electrical service enterprise stated:

> *. . . our job descriptions primarily list the obligations the company expects the employee to meet—they do not list competencies like* diagnose faults, *and are nothing like industry standards.*

Workplace competency profiles do not have to be confined to one industry sector, they can be cross-sectoral. One interviewee cited the example of a workplace competency profile covering competencies in mechanical, hydraulic and electrical fields which was drawn up for jobs in a company which marketed and serviced fork-lifts.

2.4 Employee competency profiles

An *employee competency profile* was defined earlier as a profile of the competencies possessed by an individual. It describes what the individual can do. In some ways it is similar to a résumé in that it details the experience and achievements of the individual. However, for the purpose of this project, the concept is more closely aligned to workplace competency profiles by defining experience and achievements in terms of the competencies contained in national competency standards.

For instance, a person might list *install and connect fixed wired electrical apparatus* as a competency, and then go on to describe how the competency was achieved, the types of apparatus installed, the nature of the work (e.g. industrial or domestic) and the amount of experience.

2.5 Complementary roles of workplace and employee competency profiles

Workplace and employee competency profiles can play complementary roles in the workplace. The degree of match between a workplace competency profile for a job and an employee competency profile for an individual can help determine how well the individual is suited for the job and in what areas any training might be necessary. Figures 2.5.1 and 2.5.2 illustrate this diagrammatically.

Figure 2.5.1 shows the case of an employee who has most, but not all, of the competencies needed to perform a particular job competently. Note that the circle representing the employee competency profile (competencies possessed by the employee) does not completely overlap that representing the workplace

Figure 2.5.1: **Illustration of the complementary roles of workplace and employee competency profiles: Example of an employee who does not yet possess all the competencies needed to perform a job competently**

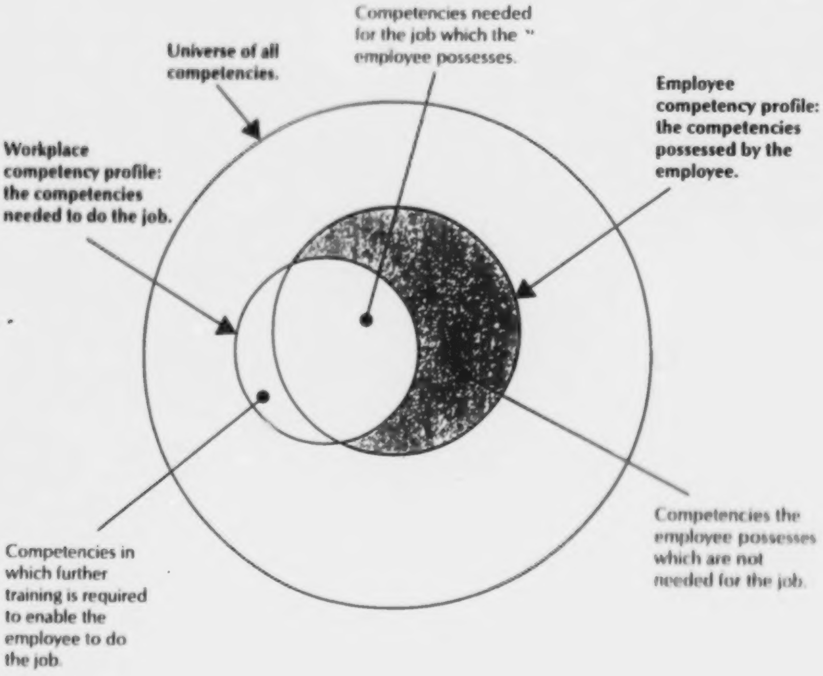
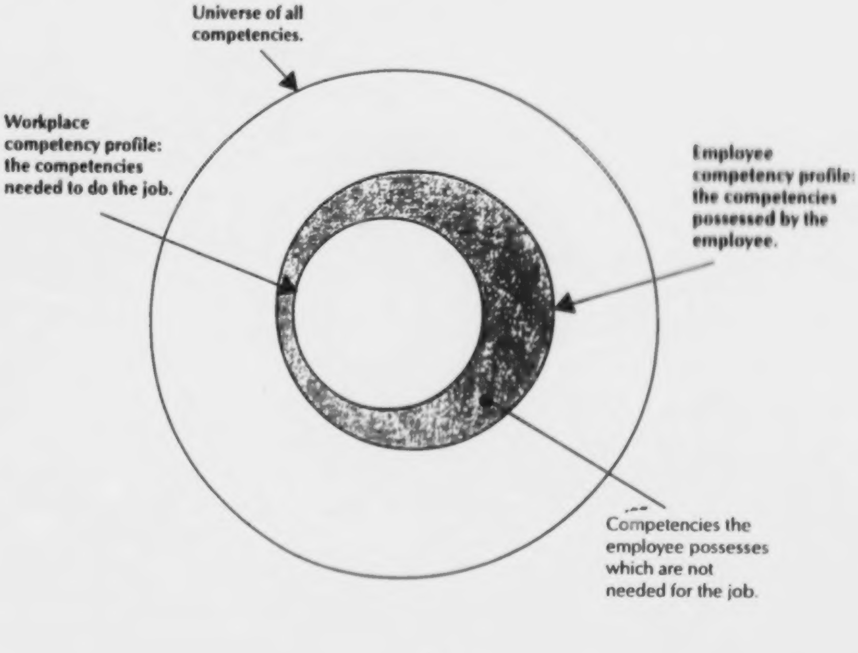

Competencies needed for the job which the employee possesses.
Universe of all competencies.
Employee competency profile: the competencies possessed by the employee.
Workplace competency profile: the competencies needed to do the job.
Competencies the employee possesses which are not needed for the job.
Competencies in which further training is required to enable the employee to do the job.

Figure 2.5.2: **Illustration of the complementary roles of workplace and employee competency profiles: Example of an employee who possesses all the competencies needed to perform a job competently**


Universe of all competencies.
Workplace competency profile: the competencies needed to do the job.
Employee competency profile: the competencies possessed by the employee.
Competencies the employee possesses which are not needed for the job.

competency profile (competencies needed for the job). The area of the workplace competency profile not overlapped by the employee competency profile is an indication of the extent of training needed. Figure 2.5.2 shows the case of an employee who would be fully competent in the job. Here, the circle representing the employee competency profile completely covers that representing the workplace competency profile.

Note also that the relative sizes of the two circles are significant. The circle for the employee competency profile is purposely drawn larger than that for the workplace competency profile because an employee will *always* possess many other competencies outside those needed for a particular job. In some cases, these other competencies represent an untapped resource which the enterprise could draw on if it knew the competencies existed. Employee competency profiles could alert the enterprise to their existence.

3 Research methodology

3.1 Choosing an industry sample

As previously stated, the initial concept was to conduct the survey across several industries. However, it soon became apparent in the planning stages that this would lead to a project which far exceeded the resources allocated. Instead, therefore, it was decided to choose a single industry sector which was well represented across all States and Territories. This was done in the expectation that many of the generalised findings would be relevant to other industry sectors and that the survey approach could be used as a model for the other sectors if further research was necessary.

The electrical industry was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, it was fairly evenly represented across all states and territories. Secondly, the inherently dangerous nature of the industry ensures there is necessarily a high level of awareness of the need for competence and willingness to consider the issues surrounding competence. Thirdly, competency was currently under review by the industry as part of a revision of its competency standards.

It was felt that in addition, in the circumstances outlined, the project would be of direct interest to the electrical industry. The project offered an opportunity for the industry to put the findings to almost immediate use if it decided to promote the use of workplace competency profiles in conjunction with the introduction of the new competency standards.

3.2 Interviews by telephone

For this project, it was decided that the information should be obtained by means of telephone interviews. For a national survey, this method of interviewing is more cost effective than personal visits. Compared to a postal survey, the telephone survey also offers the advantage of an open-ended questioning approach which can draw out additional issues for discussion.

3.3 Development of questionnaires and other materials

Following a review of relevant literature, preliminary lists of issues were drawn up. These were initially circulated for review and modification to a cross-section of key stakeholders including representatives of enterprises, unions, training providers, industry training advisory bodies and State/Territory training authorities.

The modified issues and an accompanying set of questions were then discussed and refined by four focus groups conducted in Sydney and Adelaide. In each city there were two groups. The first consisted of representatives of training providers, industry training bodies and unions, plus employees, students and trainees. The second consisted of employers, human resource managers, employment officers and operations managers. Some overlaps of the groups occurred.

From discussions with industry representatives and the outcomes of the focus groups, an important point soon became apparent. This was that the issue of indicators of workplace competency really revolved around the concept of competency profiles—sets of competencies—both for the job (workplace competency profiles) and for the individual (employee competency profiles).

Using the information gained from the focus groups, three sets of questions were prepared: one for enterprises, one for training providers and one for employees and apprentices/trainees. An explanation of the concept of a workplace competency profile and a sample profile were also developed for mailing out with the questionnaires as part of an information package for interviewees. Copies of these documents can be found in appendix 11.2.

3.4 Identifying respondents

With the help of focus group members, employer associations, industry training bodies, statutory training authorities and unions a list of interview contacts was drawn up. To provide as broad a perspective as possible, this list included representatives of small enterprises (less than 10 employees), medium enterprises (11-50 employees) and large enterprises (more than 50 employees). In addition, it included industry training bodies, employer associations, unions, statutory training authorities and their institutions, private training providers, group training organisations and secondary education.

3.5 Interviewee categories

Interviewees were grouped into three categories.

- **Enterprises**: those who were either representing enterprises or who, by the nature of their work or responsibilities, were familiar with enterprise perspectives of the issues being investigated. Interviewees in this category were asked questions contained in the enterprise questionnaire.
- **Training providers**: those who were either representing training providers or who, by the nature of their work or responsibilities, were involved in or otherwise associated with training provision. These interviewees were asked questions contained in the training provider questionnaire.
- **Employees**: those who were employees, apprentices or trainees. These interviewees were combined in a single group because of the overlaps in their roles (apprentices can be viewed both as employees and trainees, employees may be undertaking training, and trainees may be temporarily employed as part of their traineeship).

As stated earlier, three questionnaires were drawn up, one for each category. Separate sets of questions for each category of interviewee enabled interviews to be concentrated on issues most relevant to interviewees' spheres of industry involvement which, in turn, led to more productive interviews. Separate questionnaires also allowed irrelevant questions to be left out, so keeping the number of questions and length of interview within reasonable limits.

3.6 Contacting and interviewing respondents

The suggested interviewees were initially contacted by telephone and given a brief outline of the project and interviewing procedure. As part of this initial contact, they were also informed that the interview would take approximately 30 minutes. If they were tentatively interested in participating, a package of materials including the questions was forwarded. Following this, a second telephone call was made to confirm their intention to participate and arrange a firm interview time. This procedure turned out to be surprisingly effective. In all, 60 persons were contacted with a request for interview. (In fact, a further 18 people were initially contacted; however, they referred the request on to another person who was subsequently included in the total of 60.) Of the 60 persons approached with a request, only six declined to be interviewed—a response rate of 90 per cent. Interestingly, interviewees often mentioned that they were influenced to participate by the fact that they did not have to complete and forward any paperwork—they could get everything completed in a phone call.

To minimise the length of the interview and assist in accurately recording responses, interviewees were asked if they would permit their responses to be recorded on tape. All but one of the 54 interviewees agreed to be recorded. Most were unhesitating in their agreement; several commenting to the effect that they liked the idea because there would be less chance of being misquoted. Some might also have been reassured by the fact that they had previously received information about the project and knew the questions they would be asked. An important part of this procedure was that their permission to record the interview was also recorded on the tape before commencement of the interview.

3.7 Advantages and disadvantages of the survey method

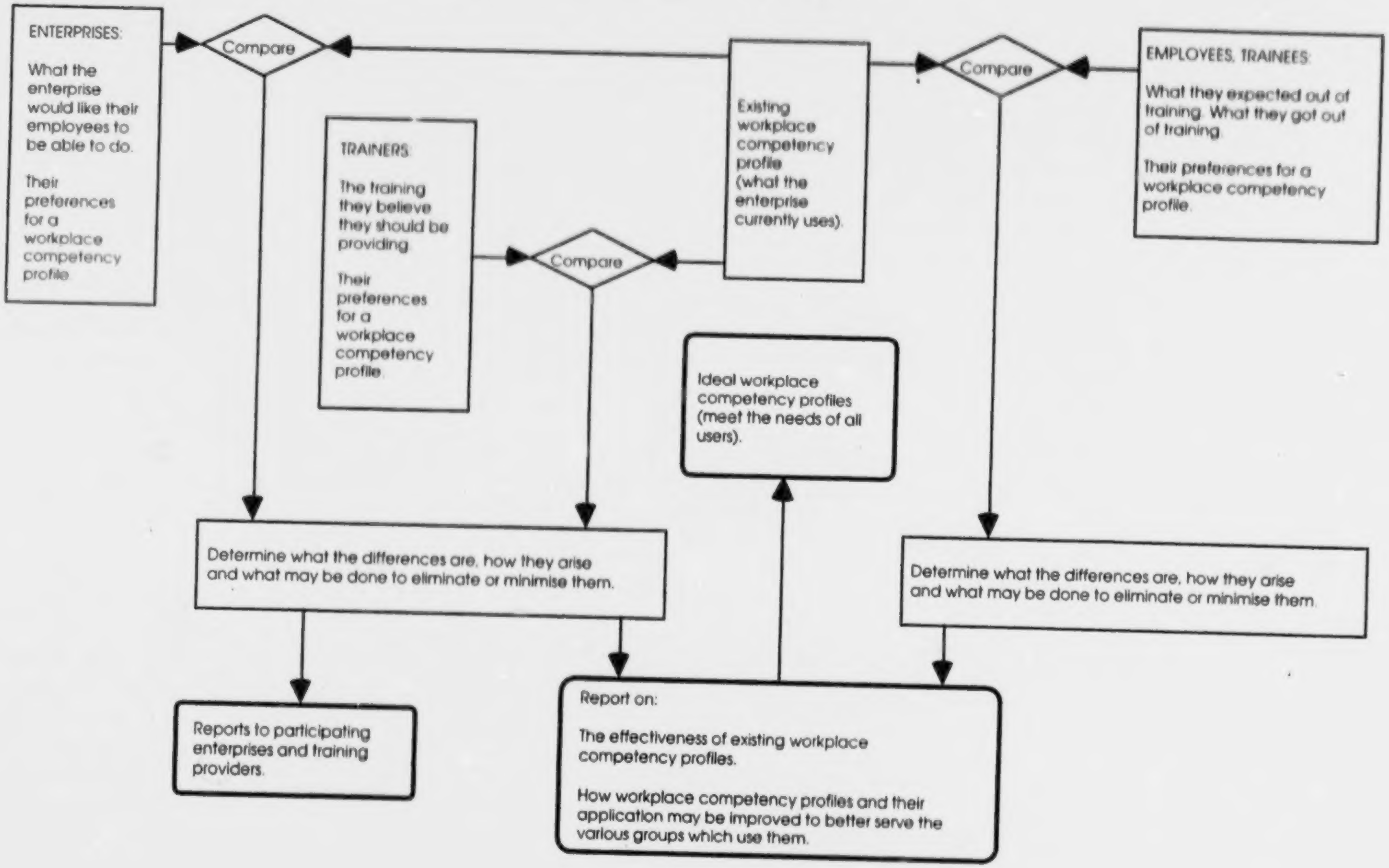
Overall, this survey procedure provided two important benefits. Firstly, a very high response rate was achieved. Secondly, because of the open-ended nature of the interview, a large amount of information was collected from each interviewee. This included interesting and sometimes important sidelights and anecdotes which would be missed in a paper-based survey. On the negative side, reviewing the tapes and transcribing the information took a considerable amount of time—usually more than double the length of the actual interview.

3.8 Overall research structure for the project

The overall research structure followed is shown diagrammatically in figure 3.8.1. Training providers, enterprises, employees and trainees were asked for their views on the issues identified for the project. Their responses were analysed in relation to the workplace competency profiles currently used in the industry or, if this was not possible, in relation to the sample profile.

From these analyses, it was hoped to determine how well the needs of organisations and individuals were met by the workplace competency profiles currently in use (or by profiles similar to the sample) and what could be done to improve the concept to better serve their needs. This information was then to be used as a basis for recommendations for the development and refinement of the workplace competency profile concept. The aim was to make the profile more closely approach the ideal which would suit all facets of the industry.

Figure 3.8.1: Diagrammatic representation of the research structure followed in this project


ENTERPRISES:
What the enterprise would like their employees to be able to do.
Their preferences for a workplace competency profile.
Compare
TRAINERS:
The training they believe they should be providing.
Their preferences for a workplace competency profile.
Compare
Existing workplace competency profile (what the enterprise currently uses).
Compare
EMPLOYEES, TRAINEES:
What they expected out of training. What they got out of training.
Their preferences for a workplace competency profile.
Ideal workplace competency profiles (meet the needs of all users).
Determine what the differences are, how they arise and what may be done to eliminate or minimise them.
Determine what the differences are, how they arise and what may be done to eliminate or minimise them.
Reports to participating enterprises and training providers.
Report on:
The effectiveness of existing workplace competency profiles.
How workplace competency profiles and their application may be improved to better serve the various groups which use them.

4 Survey sample

In compiling a survey sample and constructing the questions to be asked, it was decided that three questionnaires would be used. One questionnaire would focus on questions relating to an enterprise perspective, another to a training perspective and the third to an employee/trainee perspective. Interviewees who were not enterprise representatives, training providers or employee/trainees were given the most appropriate of the three questionnaires. However, if they felt they had more to offer from a particular perspective they were free to choose the relevant questionnaire. In fact, all but the first four or five questions in the enterprise and training provider questionnaires were virtually identical.

The target was a minimum of 50 interviewees. The final number interviewed was 54. As inspection of the tables will show, two of the interviewees—who could speak authoritatively from two perspectives—offered to respond to both the enterprise and training provider questionnaires. In view of their extensive experience, their offers were gratefully accepted, making a total of 56 interviews in all.

In selecting interviewees an effort was made to get approximately equal numbers of representatives from most categories, such as small, medium and large enterprises, TAFE institutes and so forth. The exceptions were secondary schools (which turned out to be a lower number than planned) and unions which was a limited category because there were so few of them.

Initially, it was planned that the numbers of interviewees from the various States and Territories would be roughly proportional to their populations. However, even during the early stages of the project, it was evident that there were no notable differences in the patterns of responses between States. Thus, this ceased to be an important issue. As a consequence, there is a predominance of South Australian interviewees. This occurred because many of the people consulted in connection with development of the project materials came from South Australia and their offers to subsequently participate as interviewees were taken up.

The following tables summarise the characteristics of interviewees across various categories:

Table 4.1: Summary of interviewee characteristics by questionnaire used

Type of organisation represented by interviewee	Interviewees not directly involved in training (Responded to enterprise questionnaire)	Interviewees directly involved in training (Responded to training provider questionnaire)	Apprentices, Trainees, Employees (Responded to employee/trainee questionnaire)	TOTAL
Enterprise: large	5	2		7
medium	6		2	8
small	6		1	7
Statutory training authority		3		3
State training institution		5		5
Private provider of training		4		4
Group training scheme	4	1	3	8 (7*)
Secondary school		1		1
Industry training body	1	5		6
Employer organisation	3	1		4
Union	2	1		3 (2*)
TOTAL	**27**	**23**	**6**	**56 (54*)**

* Actual numbers of individuals responding are as shown in totals marked (*). One group training scheme interviewee and one union interviewee each responded to both an enterprise and a training provider questionnaire because their responsibilities spanned both areas.

Table 4.2: Summary of interviewee characteristics by State/Territory

	State or Territory								
Interviewee category	**Qld**	**NSW**	**Vic**	**Tas**	**SA**	**WA**	**ACT**	**NT**	**TOTAL**
Enterprise: large	1	2			4				7
medium	2	1			3				6
small	1		2		2			1	6
Statutory training authority		2			1				3
State training institution				2	2	1			5
Private provider of training			1		3				4
Group training scheme		3	2 (1*)						5
Secondary school		1							1
Industry training body	1	3		1	1				6
Employer organisation			1		1	1	1		4
Union					2 (1*)			1	3
Apprentice or Employee					4	2			6
TOTAL	**5**	**12**	**6 (5*)**	**3**	**23 (22*)**	**4**	**1**	**2**	**56 (54*)**

* Actual numbers of individuals responding are as shown in totals marked (*). One Victorian group training scheme interviewee and one South Australian union interviewee each responded to both an enterprise and a training provider questionnaire because their responsibilities spanned both areas.

Table 4.3: Summary of interview type by State/Territory

	State or Territory											
Interviewee category	**Qld**	**NSW**	**Vic**		**Tas**	**SA**		**WA**	**ACT**	**NT**	**TOTAL**	
Interviewees not directly involved in training	4	6	4			10			1	2	27	
Interviewees directly involved in training	1	6	2		3	9		2			23	
Apprentice or employee						4		2			6	
TOTAL	**5**	**12**	**6**	**(5*)**	**3**	**23**	**(22*)**	**4**	**1**	**2**	**56**	**(54*)**

* Actual numbers of individuals responding are as shown in totals marked (*). One Victorian interviewee and one South Australian interviewee each responded to both an enterprise and a training provider questionnaire because their responsibilities spanned both areas.

5 Overview of questions asked

As mentioned in chapter 3, three sets of questions were used in the interviews: one for interviewees answering from an enterprise perspective; another for those answering from a training perspective; and a third for employees, apprentices and trainees.

Some questions were common to both enterprise and training questionnaires and a few to all three questionnaires.

All interviewees were asked questions relating to:

- whether they used (or would use) workplace competency profiles and, if so, what they used (or would use) them for
- what they thought of the structure and general content of the sample workplace competency profile

Enterprise and training interviewees were asked questions in common which looked at:

- whether key competencies should be included in workplace competency profiles and, if so, how it should be done
- whether attitudinal aspects of competency should be included in workplace competency profiles and, if so, how it should be done
- whether there were differing levels of importance for competencies and whether any benefit could be derived from showing such differences
- whether competencies possessed by individuals should be graded and, if so, whether grades should be specified in employee competency profiles and as a requirement in workplace competency profiles
- whether workplace competency profiles could play a complimentary role in relation to electrical licences
- whether certificates and diplomas, and similar training credentials, were good as indicators of competence in the workplace and, if so, whether they should be specified in workplace competency profiles

Each category of interviewee was also asked questions which dealt more specifically with their sphere of interest.

Enterprise respondents were asked specific questions relating to:

- whether they used workplace competency profiles
- how closely the workplace competency profiles matched industry competency standards
- how closely the workplace competency profiles they used matched their workplace requirements and how closely they matched requirements of other workplaces
- whether workplace competency profiles could be helpful in selecting new employees and allocating work tasks to existing employees

- how useful workplace competency profiles could be in designing and conducting workplace training and workplace assessment

Training respondents were asked specific questions relating to:

- how useful workplace competency profiles could be
  - in analysing training needs of workplaces
  - in selecting appropriate modules of training
  - for monitoring or assessing performance in the workplace
  - for developing curricula
- how closely their curricula and training programs matched workplace competency profiles

Specific questions asked of employees, apprentices and trainees dealt with:

- what information they received about their job and/or training course before commencing it
- how helpful it was
- how helpful a workplace competency profile could be as a source of information about a job or course of training
- the knowledge, skills and attitudes which they expected to acquire through any training currently being undertaken
- the knowledge, skills and attitudes which they had acquired through job training already completed

Copies of the questionnaires sent to interviewees will be found in appendix 11.2.

6 Summary and discussion of findings

Note: Categorisation of respondents

In this discussion, reference is made to three broad categories of interviewees, namely: enterprises, training providers and employees. This is done to simplify discussion. Except where stated otherwise, *enterprises* refers to all interviewees who responded to the enterprise oriented questionnaire; *training providers*, to those who responded to the training provider questionnaire; and *employees*, to those responding to the employee/trainee questionnaire.

6.1 Who would use workplace and employee competency profiles?

Enterprises

Analysis of responses from interviewees answering on behalf of enterprises showed that workplace competency profiles or documents of similar nature were generally used only by larger enterprises. In fact, not one of the six small enterprises surveyed said they used them. The main reasons for workplace competency profiles being used predominantly by larger enterprises were:

- Larger enterprises more often need a system for monitoring the competencies and training needs of their employees. They may also employ personnel and/or training managers who dedicate time to developing workplace competency profiles as part of a training system.
- Smaller enterprises tend to do things much more informally, relying on simple position descriptions of the type used for job advertisements. Managers often work alongside their employees and are therefore familiar with the needs of the job and their employees' competencies.
- Larger enterprises were also more likely to be involved in enterprise bargaining agreements and award restructuring—processes in which workplace competency profiles can be useful.

Nevertheless, workplace competency profiles were not altogether dismissed by small employers. Some said they would use them, particularly if they did not have to develop them themselves or were given model profiles and assistance where needed.

Group training schemes

Group training schemes in which a number of apprentices are managed on behalf of a group of host employers also appear to find the workplace competency profile concept useful. This is mainly, it seems, because of the need to plan and monitor training for a large number of individuals.

Training providers

Workplace competency profiles are not yet widely used in the industry. Because of this, only a few interviewees responding in terms of training (including industry training bodies) have had any opportunity to work with workplace competency profiles drawn up by enterprises. Training provider responses, therefore, usually referred either to profiles drawn up by themselves for training purposes or the sample workplace competency profile.

It was noted that some training provider interviewees tended to speak of workplace competency profiles as a set of units of competency applicable to a curriculum goal rather than as a set of competencies needed by enterprises. This is a reflection of the difference in orientation which can exist between training providers and enterprises. It is something which should be taken into account if any plan to promote the use of workplace competency profiles in industry is introduced.

On occasions, something like the workplace competency profile concept developed for this project was being used by a training provider. It often consisted of a set of competencies designed to meet the requirements of a generic occupation within the industry for example, electrical mechanic; or an industry (as opposed to enterprise) specialisation, such as programmable logic control.

Despite all the above, training providers generally welcomed the concept of an enterprise based workplace competency profile. They saw it as a tool which would assist them to more effectively tailor training to the needs of industry, individual enterprises or specific job categories.

Employees, trainees, prospective employees

One of the most striking findings from the responses of employees and trainees was their lack of information, before entering the industry or commencing training, about what they would be doing. However, it must be said that, for some of them, part of this was due to the relatively unplanned way in which they gravitated into the industry. Not unexpectedly, none had seen anything resembling a workplace competency profile.

In commenting on the sample workplace competency profile, general opinion was that something like it would be helpful to persons contemplating employment as an electrical mechanic (the occupation defined by the sample profile). However, some felt there would need to be additional explanation for persons not acquainted with the industry. From the comments received, employees, trainees and new entrants to the industry would find workplace competency profiles useful.

6.2 Reasons given for using workplace competency profiles

In their responses to several questions, interviewees gave reasons either for currently using workplace competency profiles or for using them in the future. The reasons they gave are summarised for the three major groups interviewed (interviewees responding to the *enterprise, training provider*, and *employee/trainee* questionnaires).

Enterprises

Interviewees responding to the enterprise questionnaire saw three main areas of use for workplace competency profiles by enterprises. They could be used in specifying jobs, selection of employees, and training and assessment.

Specifying jobs

One of the most obvious uses for workplace competency profiles is the specification of jobs by employers or industry bodies. If the profile lists the competencies required, and the performance requirements and range of application for the competencies, it presents a comprehensive description of the job. (The term performance *requirements* is used rather than performance *criteria* because the emphasis is on requirements of a job rather than criteria for assessment.)

A workplace competency profile specifying a job could be given to job applicants. From it they could determine the competencies needed and hence the knowledge, skills and (if specified) attitudes they would be expected to have. It gives them a set of benchmarks against which to compare themselves.

A workplace competency profile provides a set of benchmarks for existing employees too. Not only does it clearly set out what is expected in the job, but employees can also use it to determine any shortcomings and needs for training.

Employee selection

Enterprises might also use workplace competency profiles as a checklist against which to match job applicants. If employees were also to develop *employee* competency profiles, specifying the competencies they possess, the matching would be made even easier. This would be particularly relevant if, in both cases, the competencies were specified in accordance with industry competency standards.

Interviewees were asked whether they thought possession of an electrical licence was a satisfactory indicator of competence on the job. If not, they were asked whether a workplace competency profile could play a complementary role by being used as a checklist against which to confirm the existence of competencies expected of a licence holding job applicant. Of the 42 interviewees who responded to this question, 32 felt that a licence was not a good indicator of competence and that use of a workplace competency profile could be an effective complement.

Interviewees were also asked if they thought workplace competency profiles could be used to assist in allocating particular work tasks to employees (by matching the competencies required for the work task with those possessed by employees). Whilst the majority of interviewees responding to the question thought the concept would be useful (in conjunction with employee competency profiles), it would probably only be of real value to large companies with correspondingly large numbers of employees.

Training and assessment

Enterprises might also use workplace competency profiles to inform either their own trainers or external training providers of the competencies required on the job and therefore the training their employees will need. By matching employees' competencies against workplace competency profiles, competency gaps could be identified and, hence, training needs could be determined. If employers could be persuaded to use a common format based on industry competency standards, workplace competency profiles could collectively provide enterprises with an effective means of influencing industry training programs.

Sometimes an enterprise may wish to review an employee's performance (i.e. demonstrated competencies). For example, newly appointed employees may be reviewed after the first three months on the job. In such cases, workplace competency profiles could be given to the employees to inform them of the competencies to be assessed.

Training providers

Interviewees responding to the training provider questionnaire were asked to comment on how useful workplace competency profiles could be, particularly regarding training and assessment. Their responses were categorised as follows: analysing training needs of workplaces; selecting appropriate modules of training; monitoring and assessing employee workplace performance; and developing curricula. They also commented on how well they thought their curricula and training programs matched the competencies specified in existing workplace competency profiles or the sample profile.

Analysing training needs in the workplace

It was revealed that 13 of the 17 interviewees commenting on this issue thought that workplace competency profiles could be either *very* useful or *extremely* useful for analysis of training needs in the workplace. That is, for determining where there are gaps between what a job requires and what employees are capable of providing.

Several interviewees from TAFE institutions suggested that because TAFE institutions were becoming more involved in provision of enterprise-specific training, workplace competency profiles could play an important role in the design of such training. Properly constructed profiles, whether drawn up by the enterprise or another party on behalf of the enterprise (possibly the TAFE provider), could be a very useful tool for analysis of the enterprise's training needs. Like the TAFE interviewees who responded to this question, private training providers—which have generally tended to focus on enterprises as their clients—could gain similar benefit.

If workplace competency profiles were to be used for this purpose they should, ideally, be based on industry competency standards and contain sufficient detail regarding performance requirements and range of application for the competencies.

Selecting appropriate modules of training

After training needs have been determined, the next task is to draw up a training program to service these needs. This can involve selecting modules of training, or, if suitable modules do not exist, developing them. Interviewees generally welcomed the idea of using workplace competency profiles for this purpose. One stated that these profiles could be a valuable time saver by obviating the need to conduct costly task analysis where enterprise-specific training was required. Another observed that if suitable workplace competency profiles were available, they would assist training providers in designing and providing training for individuals seeking employment who came to them asking for training for a particular job.

Of the 17 interviewees responding on this issue, 12 thought workplace competency profiles would be either *very* useful or *extremely* useful as a tool for helping select appropriate training.

Monitoring and assessing employee workplace performance

Interviewees were also asked to comment on whether they thought workplace competency profiles could usefully contribute to the process of monitoring and assessing employee performance. The concept presented was that such a profile could be used to identify competencies to be assessed and to determine benchmarks against which competency could be judged. Of course, for workplace competency profiles to be used as benchmarks, the performance requirements (criteria) and range of each competency would have to be specified in sufficient detail. If workplace competency profiles are to be kept concise, as was strongly recommended by many interviewees, extra detail might need to be included in an accompanying document. In fact, 11 of the 17 interviewees responding on this issue felt that workplace competency profiles could be either *very* useful or *extremely* useful for monitoring and assessing workplace performance.

In supporting the use of workplace competency profiles for this purpose, training providers, in particular, felt that they could provide much needed benchmarks as a guide to assessment. Interviewees also thought they could help employers gain a better grasp of what needed to be assessed on the job. One interviewee suggested that if competencies were suitably grouped in a workplace competency profile, it could help prevent them being assessed in isolation from each other and so facilitate and encourage holistic assessment.

It was also suggested that workplace competency profiles could be useful in regard to assessment for the purpose of recognition of prior learning (RPL). The similarity between these profiles and some aspects of structured training logbooks (which define competencies to be covered and performance criteria) was noted by several interviewees. Whether training logbooks could be linked to or even based on workplace competency profiles could be an issue worth pursuing.

Developing curricula

As one interviewee pointed out, *curriculum* is not a popular term these days—trainers prefer to speak of *training programs* or *packages* instead. Despite the fact that the question referred to curricula, the responses can readily be applied to training programs or packages.

Of the 19 interviewees who responded on this issue, 16 thought that workplace competency profiles could be either *very* useful or *extremely* useful in developing curricula.

Two interviewees noted that in the past, curriculum development has sometimes preceded the development of industry competency standards with unsatisfactory consequences. They felt that if training providers were to develop their curricula around workplace competency profiles which, in turn, were based on industry competency standards, this problem would not arise.

Another interviewee saw workplace competency profiles drawn up by enterprises as a means by which enterprises could influence the content of curricula to better suit industry, as well as individual enterprise needs.

Finally, one interviewee observed that designing training curricula around workplace competency profiles could be counter-productive. It could result in a large number of curricula leading to a myriad of training classes which would not be viable because of the small number of students in them.

General

Apart from the specifically directed comments discussed above, interviewees made several other observations which were of interest. Two commented that workplace competency profiles could be valuable in the trend towards individual training plans and training agreements. Several felt that the competency profiles could contribute to better understanding of training concepts and requirements and provide a channel for clearer communication between employers and training providers. In fact, workplace competency profiles could be regarded as a tool of communication between enterprises, employees, training providers and job applicants.

Another observed that training providers would be among the quickest to understand and accept the concept of workplace competency profiles. Extending this observation, it would seem likely that industry training bodies, employer associations and unions would also be quick to grasp and use the concept. If this is the case, these organisations could contribute to implementation of these profiles if they were to assist employers and employees to develop and use them. They could also help present a co-ordinated picture of industry training requirements if they were to assist in gathering the workplace competency profiles developed by employers and presenting them to industry training bodies and training organisations.

In responding on the use of workplace competency profiles in training, interviewees were also asked who, within their organisation, would be most likely to be using them. Interviewees from four TAFE organisations and a secondary school felt that it would generally fall either to the institution-based program managers or the teaching staff responsible for training in the relevant subject area. It was noted that the responsibility for using workplace competency profiles would be that of staff in the institutions rather than in a central curriculum unit. Three interviewees responsible for training provision in large companies mentioned human resource managers or human resource staff, line managers or supervisors, and technical training co-ordinators as the most likely to use them.

Employees and trainees

Employees and trainees were invited to comment on ways in which they might use workplace competency profiles. To assist them, four possible uses were listed and they were invited to add any others. The four possible uses were:

- planning study for entry to the workforce
- planning study for your present employment
- determining suitability for a job
- preparing a job application or preparing for a job interview

Responses were almost equally divided among all four choices and no others were suggested.

Interviewees other than employees and trainees suggested that workplace competency profiles would be a useful source of information about what a job consisted of, or, more importantly, what the employer would be expecting of them. By comparing their competencies with those specified in a workplace competency profile for the job, they could also determine any additional training they might need.

6.3 Matching training to workplace competency profiles

Interviewees involved in training provision were asked to comment on how well existing training matched either enterprise workplace competency profiles or the sample workplace competency profile. Most believed there would be inconsistencies.

Some pointed out that in many industries, including electrical, it is not feasible to provide training which covers all on-the-job components of competency. (By comparison, the hospitality industry was cited as an example in which it was possible to do so.) However, two private training providers stated that because they designed training to match enterprise requirements, the match with the workplace competency profiles was very good. But custom-designed courses for individual enterprises may only suit small numbers of students making such training either expensive or economically impractical. One suggestion to help minimise this problem was the use of more universally applicable workplace competency profiles in which competencies common to many enterprises were specified.

One interviewee felt that cognitive skills such as those required for competencies like *diagnosis and repair* were not well addressed by present curricula. Another interviewee stated that competencies like *commissioning procedures* were difficult for TAFE institutions to teach because the institutions may not conduct big enough projects to enable them to be properly taught. However, another TAFE interviewee stated that, provided viable class sizes could be formed, TAFE institutions generally endeavoured to extend their programs and offer modules outside prescribed courses to suit special industry and enterprise needs.

A private training provider indicated that they were not always happy providing the training program dictated by an enterprise workplace competency profile. Where they believed the training program was not suitable they tried to persuade the enterprise to review the competencies specified. If this was not successful, they tried to incorporate at least some of the training for the missing competencies with that provided for the other competencies which were specified (*communication* was an example of a neglected competency cited in this context). Another interviewee highlighted the important role a trainer should play in advising enterprises on appropriate combinations of competencies.

6.4 Important characteristics of workplace and employee competency profiles

Match to industry competency standards

Interviewees responding to the enterprise questionnaire were asked to comment on how closely their workplace competency profiles (or, in the absence of one of their own, the sample profile) matched industry competency standards. Because so few workplace competency profiles were in use, the majority of interviewees responded in terms of the sample profile.

Most interviewees recognised that the sample workplace competency profile was generic and because of that, contained some competencies not relevant to a particular enterprise. One commonly cited in this context was number 14 on the sample profile: *assemble, work from, and dismantle scaffolding*. The inclusion of the attitudinal aspects (number 8: *work independently*, and number 9: *use initiative*) was also seen as not conforming with industry competency standards (they were included in the sample workplace competency profile for the purpose of discussion and because they are regarded by many as essential to competent work performance in the industry).

One interviewee commented that their workplace competency profiles exceeded industry competency standards because the company competed on the international market for which a higher standard of work was necessary. Other interviewees noted that company multi-skilling policies can lead to employees having competencies spanning several industry sectors. The result being that a workplace competency profile describing the position they filled exceeded that normally expected in the single industry.

Referring to the sample workplace competency profile (for electrical mechanic), one employer made the observation that very few, if any, licensed electrical mechanics (level 5) would be truly competent in *all* the competencies listed.

Match to enterprise requirements

Interviewees also commented on how closely their own, or the sample, workplace competency profile matched enterprise requirements (a choice of responses was offered: *hardly at all*; *a little*; *fairly well*; *very closely*; and *almost exactly*). Taken overall, the response was that both the sample profile, and profiles actually in use, generally matched enterprise requirements either *fairly* *well* or *very closely*. Once again, the sample workplace competency profile was seen as fairly broad. Modifications, mostly deletion of competencies, were said to be needed so that it better suited a particular enterprise's needs (*assemble, work from and dismantle scaffolding* was a frequently cited example of a deletion).

Interestingly, one interviewee commented that country enterprises may prefer a broader workplace competency profile than city enterprises because, due to their isolation, employees had to cope with a wider range of tasks. Group training organisations, too, seemed to favour broader workplace competency profiles, because the profile has to cover employees in a range of enterprises.

Applicability of workplace competency profiles across enterprises within the same area of the industry

The number of workplace competency profiles needed by an industry could be influenced by just how universally applicable these profiles were across enterprises. If workplace competency profiles were only narrowly applicable, then many would be needed to serve the needs of enterprises within an industry. If workplace competency profiles were broadly applicable across a range of enterprises, then fewer would be needed. With this issue in mind, interviewees responding to the enterprise questionnaire were asked how relevant were the workplace competency profiles they were using, or the sample profile, to other enterprises in their area of the industry. Areas of industry, in this context, refer to: electrical contracting, lifts, power transmission, and so forth.

Taken as a whole, those who spoke of their enterprise's own workplace competency profiles generally thought there would not be much difficulty in applying them in other enterprises which did the same type of work. Whilst the makes of machines and equipment might vary from one enterprise to another, the nature of the competencies required would be similar. Some interviewees responding from a group training standpoint pointed out that the workplace competency profiles they used were intentionally broad because they had to apply to a range of employers. If breadth of applicability is an important issue in any plan to implement these profiles in the industry, this group may be a source of useful advice.

The sample workplace competency profile was seen as widely relevant within each of the various areas of industry represented by the interviewees. Because it was developed from generic industry competency standards and without any specific industry area in mind, this was not an unexpected response.

Applicability of workplace competency profiles across enterprises in different areas of the industry

Interviewees were also asked to comment on how easily they thought an employee who matched a workplace competency profile in one area of the industry (say, electrical contracting—cottage wiring) could move to a different area (say, refrigeration and air-conditioning).

Both those commenting on their own workplace competency profiles and those on the sample profile generally felt that the respective profiles could still have application outside their area of the industry. However, some emphasised that it would only be a limited number of competencies which would be common—in particular, the relevant electrical competencies and occupational health and safety competencies.

One interviewee spoke of enterprises drawing up workplace competency profiles which intentionally crossed industry areas, or even industry sectors, so as to enable the enterprises to employ and train employees who can perform several types of work. For example: a workplace competency profile could be drawn up to include competencies from both the electrical contracting and motor rewinding areas or, more broadly, from the electrical and mechanical engineering industry sectors.

Narrow workplace competency profiles—a problem?

If enterprises draw up their own workplace competency profiles, they may choose to draw up a narrow profile which only contains the competencies applicable to a particular job within the enterprise. A concern was raised about the use of such profiles. If a person was trained only to meet the requirements of a narrow profile, their range of competencies may be so restricted as to make them almost unemployable in any other job in the industry. When this issue was raised in interviews it drew a surprisingly large number of responses, the majority of them supporting the proposition that narrow workplace competency profiles could lead to problems.

Some interviewees pointed out that if the problem does appear, it should not be attributed to the use of workplace competency profiles. Narrow profiles would only highlight the fact that jobs based on a narrow band of competencies already exist. They would be a symptom of the problem. Others gave actual examples; one described how even within an enterprise it was difficult to move employees from a job in one section to the same type of job in another. Several described how electrical workers in the manufacturing industry can be employed and trained (admittedly to a high level of proficiency) in repetitive work which requires only a limited range of competencies. An industry training board respondent noted that in the electronic industry, in particular, there was an emerging problem of *streaming*. In this case, employees worked only in a narrow section of the industry, such as business machines, leading to difficulties in provision of training.

Interviewees were asked to suggest ways in which problems associated with narrow workplace competency profiles could be minimised. Their responses generally revolved around licensing, application of regulations or frameworks, provision of appropriate training, or provision of model profiles.

To some interviewees, the need for employees to comply with requirements for a licence appeared to be one means of ensuring employees acquired an adequate range of competencies. This was provided, of course, compliance with the licence requirements was closely monitored.

Those who suggested regulations generally favoured a set of rules specifying the format and minimum content of workplace competency profiles. If this was done, all profiles would conform to a common format and contain at least the essential competencies necessary to work safely in the industry. It was also suggested that the idea could be extended to specify basic sets of competencies necessary for particular types of jobs. These basic workplace competency profiles would constitute the minimum requirements for a job, to which the employer could add further competencies as required.

Some of those who saw training as an answer to the problem supported the idea of compulsory broad-based training similar to that provided for apprenticeships. This would ensure that all persons working in the industry possessed the core (technical) competencies. Also suggested was making training in specific competencies readily available so that employees who lacked particular competencies could 'top up' on those they needed. Group training schemes, too, were suggested as a valuable means of ensuring people in training were given the opportunity to acquire a broad set of competencies.

It was also suggested that model profiles be made available, both to employees and employers. The idea being that if employees were given a model profile for the particular type of job they were in, they could be made aware of any shortcomings in the range of competencies they were learning or using. Similarly, model profiles could inform employers of the set of competencies which normally constitute a particular job.

Responses on this issue leave little doubt that narrow workplace competency profiles will arise—if for no other reason than that narrow profile jobs already exist. Whether or not they represent a problem would seem to rest primarily with the employee. Some may prefer narrow profiles because they wish to specialise or anticipate remaining in the one job for a long time, perhaps for the remainder of their working career. The most feasible solution would seem to be, firstly, to ensure that employees in narrow profile jobs are made aware of the breadth of profile normally expected for their occupation. Secondly, compensatory training must be made available and employees made aware of how to gain access to it.

6.5 Content of workplace and employee competency profiles

Interviewees were asked a range of questions about what a workplace competency profile should actually contain. Should key competencies like *communicating clearly and effectively in the workplace* and *perform workplace calculations* be included in the profile—and, if so, how should they be included? What about attitudinal aspects of competency like the abilities to work independently and use initiative? Do competencies vary in importance—should this be specified in a workplace competency profile? Should competencies be graded, either in terms of job requirements in a workplace competency profile, or in terms of achievement in an employee competency profile? And, should credentials, like certificates and diplomas, be specified as requirements in a workplace competency profile—are they of sufficient value as indicators of competence to make them worth including? The following is a summary of interviewees' responses on these issues.

Key competencies

The issue of key competencies was a vexed question. Key competencies are usually recognised as ones which are essential to competent work performance. So, for example, if a person could not *perform the necessary workplace calculations* (key competency number 2 on the sample workplace competency profile), they would not be able to competently *diagnose faults in apparatus and associated basic circuits* ('technical' competency number 11). Most interviewees thought key competencies should be included somewhere in the workplace competency profile. The main debate revolved around where, and how, they should be included. Three principal options emerged in the responses. One was that they be listed as stand-alone competencies, as in the sample workplace competency profile. Another was that they be incorporated, where applicable, in the performance requirements for the technical competencies (numbers 10 to 19 in the sample profile). The third option, favoured by only a few interviewees, was that there be some sort of combination of the first two.

Those who favoured listing key competencies as separate entities usually said that listing them highlighted their importance. By comparison, if they were incorporated into the performance requirements their importance would be less obvious. No interviewee disputed the idea that they were embedded in the technical competencies.

A number of interviewees commented on how important it was that individuals intending to enter the industry, particularly young people, should be aware of the need for key competencies. Several interviewees were critical of secondary schools, saying that it was their role to develop key competencies in their students in readiness for entry to the workforce and the standard of these competencies in new entrants was declining. They saw listing the key competencies in workplace competency profiles and distributing these profiles to secondary schools as one means of highlighting the need for key competencies.

Interviewees who preferred to see key competencies incorporated in the performance requirements gave two main reasons for their preference. The first, which was frequently stated, was that listing key competencies as separate, stand-alone entities might influence people to treat them that way. In particular, trainers may try to teach them as individual competencies rather than in the context of the other technical competencies. One interviewee cited an actual example in which a training organisation put employees in a classroom for 36 hours teaching them communication quite outside the context of the job.

The second main reason given for incorporating key competencies in the performance requirements was that by showing them in context, their relevance to the work performed is highlighted. An additional reason which would need to be examined, was that it may reduce the length of the workplace competency profile.

The idea of listing the key competencies separately *and* incorporating them in performance requirements only appealed to a few interviewees. Their general argument was that it was a 'best of both worlds' solution. An extension of this solution suggested by one interviewee was to incorporate the key competencies into performance requirements and list separately only those which are too difficult to include. Another is to incorporate key competencies into performance requirements and for those people who could benefit from seeing them separately listed (like secondary schools), list and describe them on a separate attachment.

One key competency which attracted a lot of comment was number 3 on the sample profile: *cultural understanding*. Most of the comment was critical, saying that it was not really relevant to the workplace. One respondent mentioned that the original concept, which would have been more acceptable, was *culture of the workplace*. This would have dealt with matters like understanding the way the workplace functioned and practising appropriate workplace behaviour.

Whilst interviewees' responses make it clear that key competencies are important and should be mentioned in connection with a workplace competency profile, they are not so clear in suggesting how it should best be done. A compromise which might satisfy most people would be to incorporate key competencies into the performance requirements for technical competencies. In addition, they should be listed and described on a separate document which, where needed, could accompany the workplace competency profile as an attachment.

Attitudinal aspects of competency

Because enterprises were said by many to regard attitudes of employees as being so important, the question of whether workplace competency profiles should refer to attitudes was raised as an issue. Interviewees were therefore asked to comment on whether or not attitudinal aspects of competency should be specified in these profiles and, if so, how it should be done. Two attitudinal aspects of competency (*work independently* and *use initiative*) were listed in the sample workplace competency profile for discussion purposes. Others (*responsibility, commitment, enthusiasm, pleasant personality, punctuality* and *ability to work reliably with minimal supervision*) were given as part of the question explanation. As some interviewees pointed out, only a few of the attitudinal concepts mentioned in the question were definable as competencies, and it was for this reason that some felt they should not appear in a workplace competency profile at all. Nevertheless, 37 of the 46 interviewees who responded on this issue felt that attitudinal aspects should be mentioned in a workplace competency profile in some way.

The minority who did not favour inclusion of attitudinal aspects usually said it was because they were too difficult to specify and to measure, or that there could be industrial and discrimination repercussions arising from their use. Certainly, if they were going to be used, people would need to be well trained to assess them. Also, as stated earlier, some interviewees did not think they belonged in workplace competency profiles because they did not regard them as competencies. One interviewee pointed out: just because an employee never turns up on time and is therefore not punctual, does not mean the employee is not a competent electrician.

Whilst *punctuality* may not be regarded as a competency, other attitudinal aspects like *initiative* and the *ability to work independently* can be treated as competencies. A person who possesses initiative, for example, is one who has the readiness and ability to initiate action, take the first steps and take the lead where necessary. There is no doubt that some people are good at this and others are not. A person who displays initiative certainly possesses particular knowledge, skills and attitudes which enable them to do it—attributes which make up a competency. Attitudinal aspects therefore need to be considered carefully to determine whether or not they fit the definition of a competency and therefore whether they might be included in a workplace (or employee) competency profile.

Reasons for including attitudinal aspects in workplace competency profiles generally centred on the need to highlight their importance and make people aware of them. Many referred specifically to their importance to employers. An example combining initiative, responsibility and enthusiasm cited by one employer was that of an electrician who, whilst installing a power point, observes that other parts of the house wiring are in an unsafe condition. He therefore notifies the owner of this and arranges for the company to conduct an inspection and give a quote.

Another interesting reason given for inclusion of attitudinal aspects in workplace competency profiles was devolution of industry decision-making to lower levels. This devolution, which is now taking place, requires appropriate attitudes (such as initiative) on the part of employees for it to be effective.

Many who supported inclusion of attitudinal aspects did so with the proviso that satisfactory ways of specifying and objectively assessing them could be devised. This can be done, but it is not always easy—possibly requiring special assessor training and, certainly, expert application of assessment procedures.

As was the case for key competencies, the issue of whether attitudinal aspects should be listed separately or incorporated in performance requirements arose. A majority of the interviewees responding to the enterprise questionnaire who voiced an opinion on this issue felt that they should be listed (nine in favour, four against). A definitive opinion could not be determined for training provider respondents because of the low number of responses.

When asked to suggest which attitudinal aspects should be listed, if they are to be listed at all, the following were specifically mentioned: *initiative; willingness to accept responsibility; commitment; punctuality; enthusiasm; motivation; preparedness to work* [*hard*]; *ability to work reliably; pride of work; honesty; pleasant personality*; and *respect for self, others and property; and loyalty*. As stated earlier, each would need to be considered carefully to determine whether it fits the definition of a competency and it can be adequately assessed using resources which could reasonably be expected in the workplace.

Several interviewees said attitudinal aspects all fell under one banner: that of *work ethics*. Others suggested that some of the attitudinal aspects could be linked together. If this were done and a useable set could be devised, perhaps the set could be formally defined and assessed as *work ethics*.

Taken overall, the general consensus was that attitudes should be included in workplace competency profiles—they are regarded as very important by enterprises. Devolution of decision-making to lower levels in industry will make attitudes even more important in the workplace. There was a preference for attitudes to be listed separately, to highlight their importance, rather than incorporated in the performance requirements for other competencies. Consideration could also be given to grouping attitudes under a single banner called *work ethics*, a term which already appears to have gained some acceptance in the industry. Before any of this, however, the attitudes in question need to be definable as competencies and adequately assessable using resources which are available to industry.

Relative importance of competencies

This issue focussed on whether some of the competencies included in a workplace competency profile might be more important than others and, if so, whether any indication of this should be shown on the profile.

Of the 44 interviewees who offered an opinion on whether or not differences in importance existed, 38 said they did. However, those who responded on the issue of whether or not relative importance should be shown in a workplace competency profile were fairly evenly divided (19 for, 16 against).

Several reasons were commonly given for showing the relative importance of competencies in workplace competency profiles related to training. This information can tell a potential employee which are the important competencies the employer expects an employee to come into the job with, or which to concentrate on acquiring as a priority. They can also tell a training provider which competencies to place emphasis on when conducting training for an enterprise.

In giving reasons for not showing relative importance, almost all interviewees responding to the enterprise questionnaire said it should not be done because importance varied from one work task to another. Some of those responding to the training provider questionnaire also mentioned this reason. Others felt that showing importance would tend to prevent trainees from obtaining a good grounding in all competencies and still others felt that all competencies should have the same weighting anyway.

When asked to nominate which competencies should be ranked as most important, seven interviewees chose them from the sample workplace competency profile. The highest ranking competencies were number 7, *awareness of and ability to use up to date technology*, (chosen by six of the seven respondents; number 17, *test apparatus and associated basic circuits;* and number 18, *undertake commissioning procedures* (each chosen by four of the seven respondents).

Interviewees also gave information about how to indicate relative importance. Some suggested it could be done by listing them in order of importance in the workplace competency profile, another said they could be assembled into several groups which could be ranked in order of importance. Others suggested relative importance be specified in a separate explanatory document.

Specifying grades of competencies in workplace and employee competency profiles

This issue was raised because it was suggested that enterprises and employees may wish to specify grades for several reasons. Enterprises may want grades included in a workplace competency profile so as to indicate to prospective employees the level of expertise being sought in particular competencies. Employees may want to show grades in employee competency profiles to indicate their levels of proficiency to prospective employers; and enterprises, too, may like to see grades in employee competency profiles to assist them in judging job applicants on the grounds of ability.

Interviewees responding both to the enterprise questionnaire and the training provider questionnaire were evenly divided on whether or not grades should be specified. Even within the enterprise group, large, medium and small enterprises each showed a relatively even balance between those in favour and those against showing grades.

Several of those in favour of specifying grades of competency said it should be done as a step towards arresting the trend towards mediocrity which, they felt, the two-grade system (competency achieved/competency not achieved) tended to encourage. Others thought it would help them better distinguish between the able and more able employees.

Grades were also seen as a useful tool for identifying the higher-level (some would say higher quality) employees suitable for roles requiring higher levels of ability or greater responsibility—roles like trouble-shooters and supervisors. It was also suggested that grades of competencies might help reliably discriminate between employees for the purpose of promotion and determination of pay rates.

Those not in favour of grading competencies felt that: grading would lead to unnecessary complications in any system of workplace competency profile use; grades would be difficult to determine and grading would be asking too much of assessors; and grades determined in the workplace may not be consistent across workplaces. In addition, the use of grades may encourage enterprises to be too prescriptive in specifying workplace competency profiles.

If grades are to be used, there would be a need to develop a system of grading which was efficient, valid and reliable. Some measures which were suggested were:

- the number of elements of a competency satisfied (this would necessitate additional, optional elements being added to extend the competency for higher grades)
- the degree of supervision of the employee needed in order for the employee to satisfactorily apply the competency (lower level of supervision means higher competency)
- the time a person [in training] takes to become competent
- careful specification of the performance requirements and range statements for a workplace competency profile

It was also pointed out that grading on-the-job components would be a necessary (and difficult) part of determining the grade of a competency.

For any grading system to be acceptable, there would need to be agreement on the number of grades and a common nomenclature. Some interviewees felt it would be best to keep the system as simple as possible; too much complexity or too many grades would make it impractical. A common suggestion was to have only three classifications: *not yet competent*, *competent* and *highly competent*. Whatever system was used, the meaning of the grades and how they were to be determined and applied would need to be clearly explained to all who were involved. To ensure consistency, it was also suggested that only qualified assessors should determine grades—suitably qualified trainers would be one obvious choice. One interviewee observed that if a poor system of grading was implemented, it would bring *all* grading into disrepute.

The matter of legal liability was raised in connection with this topic. It was suggested that employers might face litigation in the event of an accident if, for example, they asked an employee who was graded merely as competent to perform a task judged to need a high degree of competence. This is an issue which should not be overlooked if grading of competencies is introduced.

Specifying credentials in workplace competency profiles

There were two questions asked in connection with this issue. The main question was whether credentials such as certificates and diplomas awarded by TAFE and other training providers should be included in workplace competency profiles (and employee competency profiles). However, as a preliminary to this, interviewees were asked how useful they thought such credentials were as indicators of on-the-job competency.

In answer to the question of how good credentials were as indicators of competency on the job, 35 of the 39 interviewees who responded judged them to be either *fair* or *poor* as indicators of competency *on the job* (the other response choices being *good* and *excellent*). This rather surprising result was probably due to the question focussing on certificates and diplomas which were credentials awarded for training provided almost completely *off the job*. In fact, those who did not see the credentials as useful indicators of competency on the job often said possession of a certificate mainly indicated that a person was 'good at study' or 'passing exams'. Others who saw credentials in a more positive light said that they indicated possession of (underpinning) knowledge.

The fact that the credentials are seen as rather poor indicators of competency on the job may have affected the perceived value of including them in workplace competency profiles.

There were those who felt credentials were of some value as indicators of competency on the job. This group often saw them as indicating possession of underpinning knowledge which contributed to the potential of a person to work competently on the job. So, other things being equal, a person who possessed a credential would usually be seen as likely to be more competent than one without a credential. Two interviewees suggested that higher-level credentials such as advanced certificates and diplomas would be the more useful ones to include. Several commented that industry and training providers are currently working towards making credentials better indicators of competence on the job.

When asked whether credentials should be included in workplace competency profiles, 27 of the 41 interviewees who were able to respond to the question felt that they should. There were several common reasons given for their inclusion. Many felt that this enabled an enterprise or industry to present a clearer picture of the type of work a person was going to be expected to do. They also helped people plan training in preparation for applying for a job. Inclusion of credentials was also seen as a means of ensuring an individual possessed necessary underpinning knowledge. In addition, possession of particular credentials was said by some to be a factor in determining a person's qualifications (in the Australian Qualifications Framework) or in determining pay levels. Thus, if workplace competency profiles are going to be used in connection with these functions, inclusion of credentials could be helpful.

Not surprisingly, interviewees saw value in employees including credentials in their employee competency profiles. As one interviewee pointed out: the credentials made the individual more 'saleable' by indicating possession of underpinning knowledge and other special skills. Inclusion of credentials in employee competency profiles also served as indicators of a person's ability and enthusiasm.

A common argument against inclusion of credentials in workplace competency profiles was that a credential was not a competency. Rather than specify the credential, it should be the competencies implied by the credential which were specified. Nevertheless, it must be stated that whilst a credential is not a competency, it is evidence that a person possesses one or more competencies, provided, of course, the extent of training and quality of assessment is of an adequate standard.

Others felt that inclusion of credentials as requirements in a workplace competency profile could tempt enterprises to over-specify for a particular job by including credentials which exceeded the real job requirements. Specifying credentials could thus bar competent individuals, who did not have them, from obtaining the job.

There would also be the possibility that an individual who did not possess the specified credential was competent in all the knowledge and skills covered by the credential but, because it was listed in the workplace competency profile, was not seen as eligible for the job. In such cases, the individual should be able to obtain the credential through recognition of prior learning. However, this can be an involved process and, in the case of a job application, there may not be enough time.

Finally, one interviewee suggested that rather than specify a credential in a workplace competency profile, it may be better just to draw attention to it as desirable. This could be done outside the workplace competency profile; either as an addendum at the foot of the profile, or separately on an attached explanatory document.

To sum up: despite the fact that credentials such as certificates and diplomas were not felt to be good indicators of competency on the job, two thirds of respondents were in favour of their inclusion in workplace competency profiles. Their inclusion was usually supported on the grounds that, rather than directly showing competence on the job, they were useful for other reasons such as indicating underpinning knowledge, general ability and enthusiasm. Because they are so easily specified in a workplace competency profile, people drawing up these profiles would need to be cautioned not to specify more than what a job actually needed. Also, to help prevent competent individuals being barred from jobs because of lack of a specified credential, recognition of prior learning (RPL) would need to be well promoted and supported by the industry.

6.6 The sample workplace competency profile: Interviewees' opinions

As mentioned in the description of the research methodology for the project, a sample workplace competency profile was developed using information obtained from experienced industry personnel. This sample was originally devised for presentation to the focus groups. After modification based on the input of these groups, it was included with other materials sent to interviewees as an aid to explaining the concept.

As it turned out, workplace competency profiles were either a new concept to many interviewees or not yet used by them. So, in the absence of an actual workplace competency profile to comment on, many chose to base their responses on the sample. Interviewees were also invited to comment on the sample profile. Overall, the comments received from the 41 interviewees who provided detailed responses on this issue were quite favourable. The following is a summary of their responses.

General format and content

Interviewees liked the way in which the workplace competency profile was set out, saying it was simple and easy to follow. They also liked the way in which competencies were grouped and the sequence in which they were listed. However, some felt that key competencies and attitudes could have been incorporated in the performance requirements of the other 'technical' competencies or, in the case of attitudes, perhaps dropped altogether.

There was some concern about inclusion of *cultural understanding* (number 3) and *assemble, work from and dismantle scaffolding* (number 14) in the profile. Those who were concerned generally felt the first did not belong in a workplace competency profile and the second did not apply to most workplaces. However, their inclusion was of less concern if they were not a compulsory component and could be left out in any adaptation of the profile.

Range statements which were in the form of notes at the bottom of the sample profile would need to be expanded.

The conciseness of the sample workplace competency profile was liked by almost all interviewees. Many commented on the need for such a profile to be concise if it was to be accepted and used in the workplace.

Language

The language of the sample workplace competency profile was satisfactory. However, interviewees stressed the need for language to be straightforward and to avoid use of acronyms and jargon. Supplementary material could, of course, be written with a specific target group in mind, so that, for industry training providers it could include information detailing performance criteria, range statements and levels, and for secondary schools, the nature of the work performed and the topics which need to be studied (particularly with regard to the key competencies).

Supplementary material

The concept of attachments for supplementary information, the content and style of which could be tailored to suit the needs of particular user groups (such as training providers) was well supported.

Generic and model workplace competency profiles

It was generally felt that smaller enterprises, which did not have staff who could develop a workplace competency profile from scratch, could use model profiles as a basis for developing their own. Alternatively, if the model profile was sufficiently generic, they could use it as it stood.

Employee/apprentice/trainee opinion of the sample workplace competency profile

Employees, apprentices and trainees were generally satisfied with the sample workplace competency profile. The language was seen as quite satisfactory for people in the industry, but would need to be accompanied by additional explanation for people unfamiliar with the industry such as school leavers.

When asked how they would use a workplace competency profile, approximately equal weight was given to: planning study or other training, either for entry to the industry or for their present employment; determining their suitability for a particular job; preparing a job application or for a job interview.

6.7 Workplace competency profile titles and the need for uniformity

At the top of the sample workplace competency profile there appears a title *electrical mechanic*. The purpose of the title is to provide a means of identifying the collection of competencies specified in the profile. The most obvious titles, at least for the occupations at basic trade level, would be the names of declared vocations, as is the case of the sample profile. However, several interviewees have pointed out that the concept of declared vocations may be abolished, in which case the title *electrical mechanic* would cease to have formal meaning. Whether declared vocations are abolished or not, workplace competency profiles will need titles by which they can be identified, and which reflect the content of the profiles. Indeed, if declared vocations are abolished, workplace competency profiles with industry-agreed titles could be very important.

The way in which workplace competency profile titles are determined is a matter for concern. If there is no formal system, individuals who draw up these profiles will be able to give them any title they choose. The result could be a plethora of titles and confusion in the industry. To avoid this, it seems desirable there should be a formalised system set up by the industry to ensure that the titles properly reflect the content of workplace competency profiles. It should also ensure that the same, or similar, sets of competencies are not given several titles.

A properly developed and conducted system for co-ordination of workplace competency profiles would offer benefits for enterprises, employees, job entrants, and training providers. For example: enterprises and employees could benefit from easier transfers of employees between enterprises; intending job applicants could benefit from better job information; and training providers could benefit from more accurate and consistent job information needed for designing training. For this to happen, there would, ideally, need to be national agreement on a uniform system for providing titles for particular sets of competencies. there would also be a need for the sets of competencies contained in workplace competency profiles to conform with national and State legislation.

6.8 Views on employee competency profiles

Reference is made in many sections of this report to employee competency profiles. As stated earlier, an *employee competency profile* is a profile of the competencies possessed by an individual. For the purposes of this report, an employee competency profile is envisaged as a list of the competencies possessed by the individual. It also includes, for each competency, an explanation of how the competency was achieved, and a description of the types of equipment worked on, the nature of the work done, and the extent of experience. The most obvious application for employee competency profiles is for presentation to a prospective employer as part of a job application. The employer can then match it against a workplace competency profile for the position applied for as part of the selection process. In applying for jobs, employees might also like to supplement their employee competency profiles by supplying copies of workplace competency profiles for the jobs in which they had previously worked.

Several interviewees commented that if employee competency profiles were being compiled as part of an enterprise program, employees should be involved in drawing up their own profiles. This helps give them a sense of ownership of the process and its outcomes. However, one interviewee went on to describe how employees were initially resistant to drawing up profiles (as part of an enterprise agreement), feeling that it was an intrusive process and that the profiles could be used against them. This fear was gradually dispelled and employees now accept and support the idea. Employees should be made aware that employee competency profiles could be of benefit to them in presenting their case in an enterprise bargaining process. This is regardless of whether they are working for a large enterprise with many employees or a small enterprise with only a few.

Interviewees noted that employee competency profiles could be effectively used in conjunction with workplace competency profiles for allocating work tasks to the most suitable employees. However, they also pointed out that it would generally only be enterprises with large numbers of staff which would find this application useful.

7 Implementation and management implications for workplace and employee competency profiles

7.1 Promoting the use of workplace competency profiles

Whilst interviewees were not directly asked why enterprises might use workplace competency profiles, many touched on the issue in their answers. A question which was put to interviewees regarding this issue, however, was whether enterprises might be reluctant to use workplace competency profiles because of industrial relations implications. This question is considered first in the discussion which follows.

Reluctance (or willingness) of enterprises to use workplace competency profiles

In the first few interviews conducted for this survey, interviewees spoke of the possibility that enterprises may be reluctant to develop workplace competency profiles for jobs. They gave several reasons for this: industrial implications (particularly the possibility that employees may need to be paid more if the full extent of competencies required for the job were revealed); the cost of any training found to be necessary; of the extra time and effort involved in developing and implementing these profiles. As the issue was seen to be important in relation to any attempt to implement workplace competency profiles in the workplace, an additional question was developed and included in the survey.

Taken overall, interviewees were fairly evenly divided on the question. Of those who thought enterprises might be resistant to introducing workplace competency profiles to their workplaces, the majority thought it would be because enterprises feared the possibility that such a profile they be used as justification for higher wages. The other most common reasons included: the cost of additional training needed for employees who could not match the profile, a need for negotiation (with employees and unions) to settle issues encountered in drawing up workplace competency profiles or issues which ensued from their implementation, and the time which would need to be expended in the whole process.

Those who felt there would not be significant resistance to implementation of workplace competency profiles felt that the need to pay for any additional competencies would not be a serious impediment. Some said that fair-minded employers, who valued their employees and intended to keep them, would willingly pay any extra that was warranted. Others thought that employers would see the benefits arising from the use of workplace competency profiles as outweighing any costs. These benefits included: improved employee selection processes and better recognition and utilisation of competencies being used in their workplaces; better planning of training; better employee satisfaction; and clearer determination of pay rates. Several also thought employers might see profiles as a useful reference point in enterprise bargaining processes. These and other benefits will be described later under *potential benefits in using workplace competency profiles*.

Litigational possibilities were seen by one interviewee as a factor which could hinder acceptance of workplace competency profiles in enterprises because of the risk of discrimination issues. Another interviewee saw these possibilities as enhancing acceptance by enabling employers to demonstrate that they matched employee competencies to job requirements.

Need for incentives to use workplace competency profiles

Enterprises are only likely to use workplace competency profiles if they see advantages in doing so. If a scheme for implementing these profiles is to be developed, it will need to highlight to enterprises, employees, training providers and all associated organisations in the industry the benefits of developing and using workplace competency profiles (and the associated employee competency profiles). As one interviewee pointed out: if this is not done, the whole concept risks being seen as just another piece of bureaucracy.

Potential benefits in using workplace competency profiles

The following is a list of potential benefits from the use of workplace competency profiles which have been drawn from interviewees' responses. If any promotion of the use of workplace competency profiles in industry is contemplated, they could be mentioned as incentives to encourage enterprises, employees, training providers and their respective industry bodies to consider using them.

- Workplace competency profiles would help ensure there is consistency across the industry in the way jobs are specified. It was suggested that a review of job advertisements would show the same jobs and same person specifications are currently expressed in a multitude of different ways.
- Workplace competency profiles introduce greater accountability into the industry. Employers, employees and training providers all know what is required and can more easily determine whether requirements have been met.
- Although certificates, diplomas and similar credentials are seen as useful indicators of an individual's general ability and enthusiasm, they are not seen as good indicators of competency on the job (35 out of 39 interviewees rated them only fair or poor as indicators). Employee competency profiles, drawn up to match the workplace competency profile concept, could help fill the gap.
- In the event of an accident or disputed job standard, employers may be increasingly called upon to justify how they knew a person was competent. The fact that an employer has a workplace competency profile and has ensured the employee matches the profile may be the employer's strongest defence. Employers may also find workplace and employee competency profiles useful for monitoring currency of competence, which might also become an issue. One interviewee said that employers were required to

maintain records of each employee's competence in order to satisfy WorkCover obligations.

- Workplace competency profiles could enable employers to specify, for the benefit of employees and their unions, precisely what they expect from an employee in order for them to qualify for a particular job or rate of pay.

- Workplace competency profiles could be used by employers as an aid in selecting employees. They could be issued to intending applicants to inform them of job requirements and used as a checklist or benchmark against which to match applicants. Large companies might also draw up workplace competency profiles for specific work tasks and use them to select the most suitable employees for the tasks.

- It has been suggested that the new generic industry competency standards will not be award related, whereas the old [ECIA] ones were. If this is the outcome, workplace competency profiles could become a valuable tool in award interpretations—for example, a series of profiles could be drawn up for various jobs at level 6.

- Workplace competency profiles would allow employees to be better judged on merit. Employers would be expected to want this, but responses suggest that employees and their unions would also support the idea as being more fair.

- Workplace competency profiles can be used to facilitate introduction of enterprise bargaining agreements. Whenever an enterprise bargaining agreement is drawn up, there is often an accompanying reclassification process. By clearly defining job requirements, workplace competency profiles help to ensure employers and employees agree on what is expected in a job. If these profiles specify the range and level of competencies, they could make it easier to determine whether the employee meets the requirements for payment at a particular level. They also help ensure that all employees are treated equally and fairly in this process.

- Employers, through enterprise bargaining, are moving towards wanting 'multi-disciplinary' employees with competencies spanning what used to be several jobs. One described this as a 'functional' (as opposed to the traditional 'occupational') approach to specifying jobs and training. Workplace competency profiles are a means of specifying jobs which extend over several sections of an industry (such as a combination of electrical mechanic and instrument mechanic) or several industry sectors (such as electrical and mechanical engineering). An issue which does arise from this trend is what an appropriate level of payment should be. If a workplace competency profile clearly defines the competencies involved, this is a first step in the determination process.

- Workplace competency profiles can act as a common communication tool between enterprises, employees, and training providers. The profile can be used by employers to tell employees and prospective employees what they expect them to be able to do, and to tell training providers what training is required. In addition, it can be used by employees and prospective employees to help show training providers what training they want. If common workplace competency profiles were used by employers, employees and training providers, it would contribute to a system of training which everybody could understand.

- With the shift to competency-based training and assessment, there is increased need for the concepts of competence, competencies and industry competency standards to be understood and applied. The use of workplace competency profiles could contribute to their understanding and application.
- Workplace competency profiles could be a valuable tool with which to influence the content of training. If employers could be encouraged and assisted to draw up these profiles to a common format, employer associations could collect and use them to compile a picture of the competencies employers seek in their employees. This could then be presented to industry training boards, training institutions and training authorities.
- Industry competency standards, because of the comprehensive and complex nature of their content, are not seen as 'user friendly'. Employers, particularly smaller ones who do not have staff well versed in working with competency standards, might prefer to work from basic or generic workplace competency profiles if they wish to define job requirements in terms of industry recognised competencies. In this context, the workplace competency profile could be seen as analogous to the drivers' handbook issued by State authorities. The drivers' handbook contains the essentials in an easily comprehensible form which enables a person to comply with the road rules with reasonable safety and competence. Only an extremely small number of people ever read the Road Traffic Act, despite the fact that they are legally obliged to comply with it.
- for some employers, using workplace competency profiles would be the closest they would get to working with industry competency standards. A workplace competency profile therefore could be useful in acquainting them with the industry competency standards. If their attention was drawn to the fact that there was a link to industry competency standards, their awareness of the standards would be raised.
- Workplace and employee competency profiles were said to be helpful tools in the process of recognition of prior learning.
- Typical workplace competency profiles could be drawn up and added to industry careers' material already sent out to secondary schools. This would give a concise and realistic picture of the competencies required and help explain why particular key competencies are needed. These profiles could also be provided to careers' counsellors and teachers of industrial arts and technology in secondary schools to help them see what is really needed in the workplace, since few of them have much time to actually visit there.

7.2 Suggestions for development and implementation of workplace and employee competency profiles

During interviews conducted for this project, a variety of ideas for developing and implementing workplace competency profiles were raised and discussed. The following is a compilation of those ideas which, it is hoped, may be of assistance to anyone involved in developing, implementing or managing these profiles.

Workplace competency profiles should be easy to understand

Personnel in the workplace often have neither the time nor the inclination to read lengthy or complex documents. There is therefore a need to keep any information about workplace competency profiles short and to the point. The language used should be simple and direct.

Model profiles: An aid to smaller enterprises

Interviewees' comments strongly suggest that the smaller the enterprise, the less likely it will be to create its own workplace competency profiles. As stated earlier, whereas large enterprises are likely to have dedicated personnel for this purpose, development of these profiles in a smaller enterprise is likely to fall to the manager/proprietor. Apart from not being able to afford time or major financial outlay to develop a workplace competency profile, this person may also lack the necessary expertise and resources. If smaller enterprises are going to use workplace competency profiles, therefore, they will need encouragement and help to put the concept into practice. Some people also say that smaller enterprises would not want to use these profiles if they are going to have to pay for them.

In view of the above, enterprises, particularly the smaller ones, could be helped to develop and use workplace competency profiles if a series of generic or model profiles, typical of the common occupations within the industry, were made available. These could be used either as they are, or modified to suit the specific needs of an enterprise. There could, of course, be accompanying information which would include explanation of how the workplace competency profiles were to be used and how they could be modified. Examples of model workplace and employee competency profiles are provided in appendix 3.

The experience of one enterprise which had already implemented workplace competency profiles provides some useful lessons. Staff revealed that if starting again, they would begin with a generic workplace competency profile, spend more time educating employees about industry competency standards, and then move to enterprise specific workplace competency profiles. They felt that this process would be more helpful than going straight to enterprise specific workplace competency profiles.

Demonstrate how workplace competency profiles work

People will better understand the concept of workplace competency profiles if they see them actually applied. For this reason, some say it could be a good idea to develop and implement a workplace competency profile for one job in an enterprise rather than try to do all, or many, simultaneously. Once other employees see it happen they will have a better idea of the concepts involved and, providing benefits are realised, be more willing to become involved.

It is obviously good practice to make sure that all concerned in an enterprise are made aware of the potential benefits of implementation of workplace competency profiles. However, it is even more important to make sure that where the potential benefits are found to be achievable, action is taken to gain them. For example, if training needs are identified, training is provided.

Link promotion of workplace competency profiles to introduction of new industry competency standards

One interviewee was involved with the development and implementation of the new generic electrical and electronic cross-industry competency standards. This person pointed out that they involved a significant change in the culture of the industry, including the use of various 'packages' of competencies. These packages would be similar in some ways to workplace competency profiles. So, when the new industry competency standards are introduced, it might be an opportune time to also promote the concept of these profiles. This relates to the point made earlier, that workplace competency profiles could serve as an introduction to the concept of industry competency standards for those who had not seen them before.

Enterprises should plan for contingencies

Negotiating the introduction of workplace competency profiles where classifications and hence pay rates may be affected has the potential to affect profitability of an enterprise, so it needs to be worked through carefully. For example, there may be a need to negotiate whether new pay rates are to be paid 'up front' or spread by means of a series of increases. In many cases, it would be likely that neither the employer nor the employees have had much experience in this area. Unions and employer associations are two groups which could be called on for advice. Advice about these and related issues should be sought before the process is commenced, so that contingencies can be recognised and planned for.

Those affected should be involved in development

Acceptance of workplace competency profiles within an enterprise is more likely if all those affected are involved in, or at least have input into, their development. One large enterprise said it made sure that shop-floor employees were involved rather than high-level employees, who could be out of touch with shop-floor issues. Another said it formed two-person teams for each area consisting of a supervisor and a workplace peer (who was a higher-level tradesperson respected by the workers in the area). Employees should have input into the development of workplace competency profiles as well as their employee competency profiles.

A code of practice

Workplace competency profiles are more likely to gain wide industry acceptance as indicators of competence if they conform to a common format and people using them follow a common code of practice in their use. Ideally this might include:

- guidelines for constructing workplace competency profiles (including construction of these profiles based on modification of model profiles)
- a register of model workplace competency profiles, suitable for use across each industry, which enterprises can draw on as a basis for their own enterprise workplace competency profiles
- guidelines for constructing employee competency profiles

- guidelines for assessing competencies for employee competency profiles and recording them in the profile
- guidelines for verifying employee competency profiles
- a nationally accessible system for recording employee competency profiles (ideally at little or no cost to the employee)
- guidelines for interpreting and applying workplace and employee competency profiles
- readily accessible sources of information and assistance for the development and use of workplace and employee competency profiles

Workplace competency profile information channels

If it is decided that model profiles and other promotional information should be provided to assist enterprises to develop and use workplace competency profiles, attention will need to be directed to how it might be disseminated. Employer associations are one obvious channel. However, in most States and Territories, less than half the employers in the industry belong to an association. Explanatory information and sample profiles might also be sent out with licence or business registration renewals, if this is permissible. Industry training bodies, too, may be able to assist. Journals and other industry publications could also play a part in distribution of information about workplace competency profiles. Apart from promotion of the concept by means of printed materials, as just described, provision of advice and assistance by telephone, through visits to enterprises, and perhaps even seminars and workshops could also be considered.

Sources of assistance in implementing and using workplace and employee competency profiles

Interviewees suggested a range of organisations and agencies which might act as sources of advice and assistance for the implementation and application of workplace and employee competency profiles:

- industry training bodies
- employer organisations
- unions
- TAFE institutions
- private training providers
- group training organisations
- human resource consultants
- employment service organisations

8 Recommendations

Taken overall, the responses of interviewees in this project show there is strong support for the proposition that workplace and employee competency profiles be developed and implemented in the electrical industry.

Because of the generic nature of most of the issues discussed, this support is also likely to be applicable, with a few exceptions, to other industries. The main exceptions are aspects relating to peculiarities of the electrical industry, such as the need for licences in order to practise.

The following recommendations for development, implementation and promotion of a system of workplace and employee competency profiles are based on the detailed responses of interviewees for this project. The electrical industry is not specifically referred to in the recommendations because, as suggested above, it is envisaged that they would be generally applicable to a range of industries.

8.1 Development and implementation of the concept

If a system of workplace and employee competency profiles is to be developed and implemented in industry, it is recommended that:

a) Industry training bodies should play the leading role with the groups listed below being either invited to participate, or at least consulted in the process:

- employer associations
- unions
- statutory vocational training authorities and their institutions
- State/Territory and private senior secondary schools
- appropriate student representatives in vocational training institutions

b) Information be developed outlining benefits which could be gained by using workplace and employee competency profiles, including:

- a more uniform system for defining jobs (workplace competency profiles) and competencies possessed (employee competency profiles)
- clearer communication between employers, employees and training providers
- better portability of competencies
- improved quality of employee selection process

c) The information under (b) should be distributed to enterprises and employees by the following groups:

- industry training advisory bodies
- employer associations
- unions

- training providers
- employment service organisations

d) the groups named in (c) offer services to enterprises and employees to help them develop and apply workplace and employee competency profiles

e) consistent and effective use of workplace and employee competency profiles be facilitated by means of an industry wide code of practice including:

- guidelines for constructing workplace competency profiles or modifying model profiles
- guidelines for constructing employee competency profiles
- guidelines for assessing competencies for employee competency profiles and recording them in the profile
- guidelines for verifying employee competency profiles
- guidelines for interpreting and applying workplace competency profiles and employee competency profiles

f) a nationally accessible system for recording employee competency profiles (ideally at little or no cost to the employee) be developed

8.2 Implementation and promotion procedures

In order to introduce a system of workplace and employee competency profiles, various procedures will need to be developed and implemented. To achieve this it is recommended that:

a) workplace competency profiles be identified by titles which reflect the contents of the profiles and hence the competencies and nature of work they cover. These could be occupational titles if an agreed set of titles is used across the industry

b) a set of model workplace competency profiles for common occupations be developed and made available to enterprises, training providers, employees and other interested parties at no cost. Each model profile is to:

- be given an occupational title agreed on by the industry
- specify the minimum set of competencies needed to meet the requirements of the particular occupation, as well as contain examples of additional competencies commonly specified for the occupation
- be accompanied by a straightforward explanation of its general purpose, structure and content
- be accompanied, where relevant, by guidelines detailing how it may be adapted to meet particular enterprise requirements and how the adaptation can be carried out to allow the industry-recognised title to be retained

c) employee competency profiles be promoted as a complement to workplace competency profiles, and model employee competency profiles be developed to assist employees to draw up their own profiles

d) a service offering advice and assistance be made available at minimal cost to enterprises and employees wishing to select and use existing workplace and employee competency profiles or, alternatively, wishing to develop their own

e) procedures be developed for checking and formally accrediting workplace competency profiles developed for individual enterprises

f) training providers be encouraged to use workplace competency profiles in developing training

g) consideration be given to:

   - the use of workplace competency profiles in development of enterprise bargaining agreements
   - the application of workplace competency profiles to multi-disciplinary jobs (for example, across industry sectors)
   - linking the promotion of workplace competency profiles to any major revision of industry competency standards

h) the preferred method of introduction of workplace competency profiles to a workplace be to target one job or work group and, if successful, use the benefits achieved as an example to encourage others in the enterprise to follow suit

i) positive action be taken to achieve any benefits which become apparent from application of workplace competency profiles

8.3 Format and content of workplace and employee competency profiles

Based on survey responses regarding format and content of workplace and employee competency profiles, it is recommended that:

a) workplace competency profiles be based on industry competency standards

b) workplace competency profiles be:

   - formatted in a similar way to the sample profile developed for this project
   - use simple language
   - be kept concise (if possible, to a single page) with additional material, such as expansion of range statements and information for training providers, being provided in supplementary documents which can be attached as necessary

c) key competencies not be listed as stand-alone components in workplace competency profiles, but instead be mentioned in performance requirements where relevant, and that separate lists of key competencies be drawn up and published as a supplement to a workplace competency profile for those who have a special interest in them (particularly senior secondary schools and their students)

d) attitudinal aspects of competency directly relevant to the work covered by the workplace competency profile be listed in the profile, along with advice on how they can be adequately specified and measured, and consideration be given to grouping them under a heading: *work ethics*

e) employee competency profiles be based as much as possible on competencies specified in industry competency standards, and that they specify:

- the relevant competencies possessed
- the level of each competency (where specifiable)
- how, when and where each competency was acquired
- the extent of experience in each competency

9 Responses from enterprises and training providers

Note:

1 Editing of comments

Although interviewees' responses were tape recorded, they have not been transcribed verbatim into this report. Some editing has been performed to remove parts which were not pertinent to the issue and to improve grammar so as to reduce length and make the comments easier to read. Special care was taken to ensure that the edited comments remained consistent with the interviewees' original responses. The edited responses were forwarded to all interviewees for verification prior to their inclusion in this report.

2 Sources of comments

Sources of comments are indicated by means of the interviewee's work role in parentheses at the end of each comment. Identification is generally by means of the nature of the organisation the interviewee represented. However, where an individual did not represent an organisation, the interviewee's work role was used.

3 Sample workplace competency profile

A copy of the sample workplace competency profile, which is frequently referred to in the comments, can be found in appendix 11.2.

9.1 Do you currently use workplace competency profiles?

This question was asked in order to get an indication of how widely workplace competency profiles, or documents of that nature, were already in use in workplaces. The question was only asked in the enterprise questionnaire.

Twenty-three interviewees were able to respond to the question (eight large enterprises, five medium-sized enterprises, six small enterprises and four group training schemes). Their responses are summarised in table 9.1.1.

From table 9.1.1, it may be seen that the larger the enterprise, the more likely it is that workplace competency profiles will be used.

There appear to be several reasons for this trend. The larger enterprises often need a system for monitoring the competencies and training needs of their employees and employ personnel and/or training managers who dedicate time to developing workplace competency profiles as part of such a system. Managers or proprietors of smaller enterprises, on the other hand, often stated that they personally worked alongside their employees and therefore were familiar with their employees' competencies and the needs of the job. They also tended to do things much more informally, relying on basic position descriptions of the type used for job advertisements.

Table 9.1.1: Use of workplace competency profiles by different categories of organisation.

	Large enterprise	Medium enterprise	Small enterprise	Total	Group training scheme
Using a workplace competency profile	5	3		8	2
Using something like a workplace competency profile	3	1		4	1
Not using any workplace competency profile		1	6	7	1
Total	**8**	**5**	**6**	**19**	**4**

It was also noted that larger enterprises were more likely to be involved in enterprise bargaining agreements and award restructuring—processes in which, it seems, workplace competency profiles can play a useful role. One interviewee suggested that enterprise bargaining agreements could lead to enterprises seeking employees with competencies across several disciplines (e.g. electrical and mechanical). This is a situation in which workplace competency profiles could again be useful.

Group training schemes in which a large number of apprentices are managed on behalf of a group of host employers also appear to find the workplace competency profile concept quite useful.

One interviewee from an employer association described how employers relied on the fact that a person had passed through the trade training system and licensing requirements as an indication of competency at tradesperson level. However, for assessing a person's competency at higher than tradesperson levels, they used existing industry competency standards as a benchmark. This would suggest that a workplace competency profile based on industry competency standards would be useful to enterprises at the higher levels, at least.

❖ The ECIA competency standards are used by most [of our] employers to assess anybody's competencies above level 5 [levels 6, 7, 8]. Level 5 is the tradesperson. At level 5, reliance is placed on the trade training system and the licensing system rather than the competency standards. However, for promotion or higher-level technical work, they look to the competency standards. Some have expanded the competencies to include an industry-specific arrangement and have included it in their enterprise bargaining agreements. (Employer association: #3)

A number of interviewees, particularly those from training providers and industry organisations, commented that many people in the industry are either unaware of the existence of industry competency standards, do not understand them, or have not grasped their significance to the workplace.

❖ We were at a national meeting recently and most of the TAFE teachers there didn't know about competency standards . . . and at another meeting at [TAFE college] we were sure that the people there hadn't even seen the competency standards for the industry in which they were teaching the course. One of the problems [therefore] is that a lot of the TAFE teachers don't understand what competency standards are all about . . . workplace competency profiles would make it a lot easier for them to come to grips with them. (Industry training body: #2)

In discussing workplace competency profiles with training providers, it seemed that some saw them simply as a set of industry competency standards rather than a set of competencies generated by an employer or employee. It was also noticed that, although many interviewees were not familiar with the term workplace competency profile they were, in effect, using them.

- Although workplace competency profiles are not commonly referred to, they are in a sense being used already when a set of units of competency are strung together. (TAFE – State authority: #3)

One employer was concerned that workplace competency profiles (and employee competency profiles) might be unfair to employees . Profiles could draw attention to the fact that even though they were good employees, they were not as strong in a particular area as their workmates.

- No, I do not use workplace competency profiles. Even if I had two or three guys, I would have reservations [because] . . . using them could discriminate against people. I would only use them if [I could be sure] their use did not cause discrimination. (Enterprise – small: #6)

Summary of responses

Only a small proportion of the electrical industry currently appears to be formally using workplace competency profiles. This consists mainly of the larger enterprises which have a need for systems to monitor positions and individuals within the enterprise and which often dedicate staff to this function. Smaller enterprises, which tend to deal more directly and personally with their staff, are less inclined to use these profiles.

Some responses also suggested there could be a rather widespread lack of awareness of the concept of industry competency standards and their applications, both on the job and in training.

9.2 What is your opinion of the sample workplace competency profile? How can it be improved?

The sample workplace competency profile was developed using information provided by industry focus groups conducted in the early stages of the project. It also used consultation with individuals from industry and vocational education who were familiar with the concepts involved. It formed part of the materials sent to interviewees prior to interview. In this question interviewees were asked to comment on the style and format of the sample profile and suggest ways in which it might be improved.

The favourable comments received from almost all of the 41 people who responded to the question are seen as a reflection the experience and good judgement of those who advised on its development. The following is a selection of comments received.

Style and content

All of the 41 people who felt able to respond to this question were generally satisfied with the style and content of the sample workplace competency profile. However, many qualified their responses by stating that they viewed it as a generic or model workplace competency profile which could be customised to suit the needs of particular users.

- ❖ The sample profile lists a wide range of competencies—it is a generic model. It is unlikely that many people are going to be truly competent in all of them. For example, a person might be competent in fault finding and service type work but may not be up to scratch on installation work. Also, the language used needs to match that of the end user—if it is for employers or employees, it needs to be free of academic jargon. (TAFE – State authority: #3)

One interviewee felt that it may be difficult for people not involved in training to use because of their unfamiliarity with the concepts:

- ❖ The sample workplace competency profile would certainly be easy for a training person to use but may not be so easy for those in the industry who have little understanding of competency-based profiles. There will need to be an education program to help people understand and use them. Any education program used for this [purpose] would have to be well written, without the usual jargon which goes over the head of the average workplace. (Employer association: #2)

Another felt that *use of hand tools* should be included as a competency in its own right:

- ❖ What is missing is the ability to use hand tools. This should be highlighted in the profile. Our last two apprentices really don't know how to hacksaw a straight line or file a block of metal square. Training seems to be going more into brain stuff and not actual ability to cut six pieces of wire the same length. They know about PLCs, but when they put a power point on a wall, it's crooked. (Enterprise – small: #1)

Size

On the basis of the advice received, a special effort was made to keep the size of the sample workplace competency profile down to one page and to set it out clearly. Many of the interviewees commented on these aspects:

- ❖ Its conciseness is a good feature, if it's too long, people will not read them. Model workplace competency profiles such as the sample would be a useful starting point for enterprises wishing to develop their own. In fact to start from scratch would be too much for a small organisation to take on. There needs to be a lot of support information available as well. (Enterprise – medium: #5)
- ❖ The format of the sample profile is on the right track, it should be a single page if possible. (Industry training body: #6)
- ❖ It's OK. You would not want it to be any longer than this. (Enterprise – small: #2)
- ❖ [You] wouldn't want to go too far and have workplace competency profiles that are so inclusive and detailed as to become unusable. (Industry training body: #3)

- You need to keep it as concise as possible—people don't have the time to read and use long documents . . . The small employer just doesn't have the time or the resources to read through the industry competency standards—the workplace competency profile could offer a short form of the relevant standards. (TAFE – institute: #3)
- The sample profile covers the job fairly well. Its format is about as good as you can get without resorting to restating the [industry competency] standards which would make it much longer. (Union: #1)
- Some of the points would need to be a little more developed—but you will need to avoid too much written material. All on one page is an advantage, but it looks a bit cluttered. A concise sample workplace competency profile could be a valuable thing in getting smaller employers in particular to begin thinking about developing and using workplace competency profiles. If you can put something in front of a person which they only need to adapt, they are more likely to take it up and use it. (Industry training body: #3)
- The sample profile is quite good as it is—no changes are really necessary. Employers and others close to particular sections of the industry may like to modify the competencies which are most relevant to their area—mainly to insert more specific detail. But if they try to cover everything it will become a complex document. (Industry training body: #5)

Language used

Several interviewees commented on the importance of the language used:

- One problem with the use of workplace competency profiles is that you need to take employers through the process of what competency is before they will understand what you are talking about. The language of competency is important—you need to explain what competence is and how it works—especially to the small employers. You could provide supplementary material to explain the concepts—perhaps in a graphics format rather than in words—employers just don't have time to spend looking at printed material. (Industry training body: #4)
- The sample format is user friendly . . . less complicated than the ones we use . . . easy to understand at a glance. We should try to write workplace competency profiles as clearly as possible to suit the lowest common denominator of persons likely to use them. We won't get anywhere unless people comprehend them. (Enterprise – large: #3)

Supplementary information

The idea of supplementary explanatory sheet(s) to help overcome language and terminology barriers, as described above, was popular with interviewees. Of course, this supplementary material could also provide relevant additional information the particular user requires.

- There shouldn't be different versions of the same profile for different audiences, this could lead to different interpretations. It is better to have separate explanatory documents, for different audiences, to go with the workplace competency profile. (Trainer – large employer: #1)
- The idea of separate descriptive notes and explanations sounds good. (Industry training body: #6)

❖ Keep workplace competency profile brief and to the point and provide additional explanation for those who need it. This gives the employers [and others] the option of reading either a short or expanded version. (Private training provider: #1)

Thus, the supplementary material would enable a one-page workplace competency profile to be adapted for various groups. For employees, for example, the supplementary material would need to be brief, jargon free and straightforward in its explanation of the concepts and terminology. For training providers, training terminology could be used and the content extended to include details of performance criteria, range statements, etc. Employers, too, could have supplementary material detailing performance criteria and range statements but, as with the employee version, an effort should be made to keep it jargon free. Depending on how far the idea was pursued, career counsellors and school leavers could also be catered for with supplementary materials which were relatively basic and descriptive. The aim would be to provide a single, concise workplace competency profile to which is added accompanying supplementary material to suit the user. The use of graphic or pictorial information is an interesting idea—if feasible, it could certainly be considered for users not accustomed to dealing with the concepts involved.

Suitability for secondary schools

Discussion centred on the use of workplace competency profiles in secondary schools as a resource for students considering career choices. An experienced careers' advisor from a senior secondary school dismissed any suggestion that the students would need simplified versions of workplace competency profiles:

❖ Workplace competency profiles should be standardised as much as possible and use a common vocabulary, they should not have a special version for secondary students. Secondary students may find them a bit hard because they are not familiar with the concepts, but this would not be a problem if they are helped to understand it by a careers' counsellor. (School project officer: #1)

An industry training body interviewee suggested:

❖ . . . [it] would be useful to have typical workplace competency profiles linked in to career profiles which go to secondary schools [as an industry source of career information]. (Industry training body: #5)

On the basis of this advice it appears that, providing careers' counsellors were given appropriate supplementary material, the standard workplace competency profiles would be satisfactory as a career resource in secondary schools.

Generic and model workplace competency profiles

As stated earlier, many interviewees pointed out that they saw the sample workplace competency profile as a generic or model profile—suitable as a basis on which to develop a profile to suit the needs of a particular enterprise. The enterprise-specific profile might contain a modified set of competencies—possibly some deleted, others added—and would be likely to contain more details of the competencies.

❖ Most small businesses are not going to create a profile, they will be more than happy to use one that is ready made for them. If they are given something to start from they can modify them to suit their own needs. (Industry training body: #4)

- The concept of a model profile which can be customised is a good one. (Industry training body: #3)
- The sample profile is similar to what we use, however, we also have a series of range statements so that the performance requirements are specified for a range of variables. The sample profile is fairly generic . . . but [even an enterprise profile] should not go as far as mentioning specific items of equipment, etc.—that would be too prescriptive. (Group training scheme: #1)
- I would like to see more detail. For example, OH&S and repair faults in apparatus competencies are too broadly stated. The latter needs a lot more detail on types of appliances such as hairdryer, electronic motor starters etc. (TAFE – institute: #4)
- [The] sample profile would not be a lot of use in developing curricula and training programs—but the competency profiles that [we] use, which contain more detail, are useful. (Enterprise – large: #6)
- The sample workplace competency profile is quite good, but perhaps a little bit light on in terms of competencies. (Enterprise – large: #5)
- Perhaps the sample profile could be simplified a bit by amalgamating some of the key competencies and attitudinal aspects. However, number 10 downwards are the work tasks – these need to be stated as separate competencies. The result would be a profile that still includes all the essential competencies but would be more flexible to allow employers to more easily customise the profile to suit their needs. (Group training scheme: #4)

As one interviewee pointed out, the level at which the workplace competency profile is pitched also affects the content.

- The sample workplace competency profile for electrical mechanic is at AQF level 3 (or the old ECIA level 5). As the level goes up, the underpinning knowledge and skills become far more generic and the context depends on what the organisation does. Thus the range statements [at the bottom of the sample workplace competency profile] become broader and the performance requirements change. (TAFE – State authority: #3)

Workplace competency profile titles and the need for national uniformity

In discussing the format of the sample workplace competency profile, some interviewees commented that there is presently a move to abolish declared vocations. If this eventuates, it could mean that the titles at the top of the workplace competency profile (*electrical mechanic* in the case of the sample profile) may become an issue to be resolved. Ideally, as one interviewee pointed out, the title should reflect the collection of competencies contained within the profile.

- Apart from NSW, the States are doing away with vocational callings so it will not be appropriate to identify profiles as 'electrical mechanic', for example. You could take out the title and just call it a profile of a job. (Industry training body: #6)
- Even though declared vocations may be dropped, there will still be titles attached to people with particular sets of competencies. (TAFE – State authority: #3)

It is unlikely that the industry will be able to resist giving particular sets of competencies a title. This could happen informally, with titles being devised by anyone who fancied doing so, or it could happen more formally with agreement between the various industry groups concerned. If it happens informally a confusion of overlapping titles is likely to be created. This would detract from the usefulness of the concept of workplace competency profiles to all sections of the industry.

- ❖ [We are] moving away from prescribed training programs and towards training packages . . . potentially, down the track we may have literally thousands of competency profiles. (Industry training body: #6)

If workplace competency profiles are to provide maximum support for portability of competencies, it is also important that they conform to standards recognised and accepted nationally across the industry. As one interviewee observed:

- ❖ . . . workplace competency profiles must be constructed in conformity with the national and State legislative requirements. This will have some bearing on portability and transferability. (TAFE – State authority: #1)

Taking these two points together it would seem that portability of competencies, the ability of employees to transfer from one job to another, and the value of workplace competency profiles to the industry generally, would be enhanced. This rests on two contingencies: firstly, if national agreement could be reached on a uniform system for providing titles for particular sets of competencies; and secondly, if the competencies contained in workplace competency profiles conformed with national and State legislation.

Other comments

There were many other comments on the format and content of the sample workplace competency profile which arose in response to the question being dealt with here. However, because they related to topics covered by other questions, they will be discussed later in the report.

Employee competency profile

To this point, the discussion has focussed predominantly on the relevance of the format and content of the sample workplace competency profile to the needs of employers and training providers. During the course of the project it became evident that there could be another distinctly different, but nevertheless related, version of a competency profile which could be drawn up by individual employees. Like the workplace competency profile, the employee profile would list competencies (in this case they would be competencies possessed by the individual). However, instead of performance requirements and range statements, the employee profile would list such things as the level of the competency, how it was acquired and the extent of experience in it. For the sake of discussion it will be referred to as the *employee competency profile* in the remainder of this report. However, there are other titles it might be given, such as worker competency profile.

Summary of responses

In general, the overall tenor of the responses to this question on the format and content of the sample workplace competency profile was extremely positive. Perhaps we should close this section with a couple of bouquets:

> *If you gave it [sample workplace competency profile] to a contractor they would think it contained a lot of information – a general contractor would love to have something like that. (Enterprise – large: #6)*

> *The style of the sample workplace competency profile is excellent, 10/10. It is a very good model—the descriptors are very good . . . I'm going to show this to [name]. (Enterprise – large: #4)*

9.3 How useful are workplace competency profiles in training and assessment? (Interviewees answering from an enterprise perspective)

This question was intended to find out how employers and other industry representatives who were not directly involved in the design or delivery of training viewed the usefulness of workplace competency profiles in relation to training. In particular, they were asked for comments on the application of these profiles in relation to analysis of individual training needs, matching of training to job requirements and assessment of competence in the workplace. If interviewees were not familiar with any workplace competency profiles actually being used in the workplace (as was the case for most interviewees), they were invited to comment instead on how useful for these purposes a profile like the sample might be.

The following are some of the comments received.

General usefulness of workplace competency profiles in training

All of the interviewees not directly involved in training felt that workplace competency profiles could be useful in training either in the workplace or off the job. Those who took up the invitation to rate their overall response on the scale provided produced the pattern of responses shown in table 9.3.1.

Table 9.3.1: Usefulness of workplace competency profiles in training: Interviewees not directly involved in training

	No use at all	A little use	Moderately useful	Very useful	Extremely useful	TOTAL
Enterprise: large				3	3	6
medium			2	2	2	6
small			2	2	1	5
Employer organisation				2		2
Group training scheme				2	1	3
Industry training body				1		1
Union					2	2
TOTAL			**4**	**12**	**9**	**25**

Large companies see workplace competency profiles as more useful in training

Not surprisingly, the larger companies, often with dedicated training personnel and already established training programs, saw workplace competency profiles as more useful than did smaller companies. Several interviewees commented to this effect:

- Quite probably [useful], especially for the larger firms which have personnel people. (Enterprise – medium: #4)
- Some employers may use them, more so the larger ones. (Group training scheme: #2)
- Useful for the medium and large employers. Employers with ten and under employees expect their employees to have the skills, and if they haven't, they expect the person to go and get training—so they won't be designing training programs. (Industry training body: #4)
- Designing and implementing training was one of the primary reasons for developing profiles . . . (Enterprise – medium: #5)

Several of the small employers highlighted the fact that they knew their employees so well, they would not need to use workplace competency profiles to plan training:

- [As a small employer] you invariably become aware of the need for further training through personal contact with the employees, however, a workplace competency profile could serve as a useful guide. (Enterprise – small: #4)
- They could be useful [to some employers] to help get employees multi-skilled. However, as a small company, we would not have to use a workplace competency profile to find out what training is needed—I'm closely in touch with my employees through their work. (Enterprise – small: #6)

Ways in which workplace competency profiles could be useful in training

When asked about ways in which workplace competency profiles could be useful in training, most of this group's responses focussed on analysis of training needs and development of training programs.

- At this stage [workplace competency profiles are] mainly being used for identifying skills gaps and developing training modules to eliminate the gaps, so it is mostly the training providers and supervisors that are using them. (Enterprise – medium: #5)
- [They are] not yet used to determine training needs. However, once things are ironed out, they will be used for this. (Enterprise – medium: #1)
- Allows an employer to look at what a job requires, then look at employee profiles and select an employee who needs to learn it or gain experience in it. (Group training scheme: #4)
- Workplace competency profiles allow you to tailor your training to exactly what you need. At the moment we tend to be a bit ad hoc and people feel they should be trained in all sorts of things which are not relevant to our directions. Doing a skills audit and matching the skills to a set of competencies in a workplace competency profile this enables you to identify the gaps quite clearly. [This is] good because the process and requirements are open to all concerned. (Enterprise – medium: #3)
- We tend to use them as a guide for us particularly for training; we make sure all of the outcomes are there for the seven core competencies that people are expected to have. (Union: #1)

Other responses included:

- Staff are using [workplace competency profiles] . . . to identify training needs, assess people's performance and determine salary range. [Workplace competency profiles are also linked] to pay—so if person reaches a higher level they can have their salary reviewed. This gives people standards they can aim for. (Enterprise – large: #4)
- [The] RPL process through TAFE is also working well in conjunction with [workplace competency] profiles. Enterprise – large: #5)
- [Workplace competency profiles] would make it easy for employers, employees and trainers—everyone knows where they stand. (Union: #2)

One interviewee highlighted the value of workplace competency profiles in multi-skilling of employees:

- [We] use workplace competency profiles a lot for developing training, so that employees are multi-skilled. (Enterprise – large: #4)

This touches on another aspect of workplace competency profiles: that, some profiles bridge several streams of an industry such as electrical contracting and security, or even several industry sectors such as mechanical and electrical.

Finally, a group training scheme interviewee highlighted the value of *employee competency profiles* in training; that is, profiles which list the competencies an individual possesses. Such a profile could be standardised to contain the core competencies the employee would always be expected to have, plus a list of the additional competencies the employee (who could be an apprentice or trainee) chooses to acquire. Against these competencies could be recorded details of the training and work experience the employee has successfully completed. Such a record would be extremely useful as a training tool. This concept would have characteristics in common with the logbook already used by apprentices and trainees.

Usefulness of workplace competency profiles in workplace assessment

The interviewees not directly involved in training were also asked how useful workplace competency profiles could be as a tool to assist in assessment of a person's competence in the workplace. Table 9.3.2 shows the pattern of responses received from interviewees who used the suggested rating scale.

Table 9.3.2: Usefulness of workplace competency profiles for assessment in the workplace: Interviewees not directly involved in training

	No use at all	A little use	Moderately useful	Very useful	Extremely useful	TOTAL
Enterprise: large			3	1	1	5
medium			1	2	2	5
small		1	1		2	4
Employer organisation		1		2		3
Group training scheme				2	1	3
Industry training body						
Union			1		1	2
TOTAL		2	6	7	7	22

Assessment requires more detailed workplace competency profiles

Several interviewees emphasised that the workplace competency profile would need to be more detailed if it were to be suitable for this purpose. One also added that the ability to customise it would be important:

- [The workplace competency profile would be] very useful—providing the individual competencies required are expanded to be more specific. It would certainly work if employers were able to customise the sample workplace competency profile. (Enterprise – large: #1)
- . . . probably would [use workplace competency profiles for assessment]—providing they contained all the detail on competencies and performance criteria. (Enterprise – large: #6)

Reviewing employees' competencies

Others commented on the use of workplace competency profiles as a tool for focussing on and reviewing employees' competencies:

- We [use a workplace competency profile for assessment] all the time. [It is] excellent for this purpose—takes out the bias in the system. [It] enables the staff themselves to identify their weaknesses and their strengths. (Enterprise – large: #4)
- [A workplace competency profile] would encourage and help employers to sit down and look at just what their employees could do. (Group training scheme: #2)
- . . . extremely useful [for assessment] because it can so clearly show what an employee is expected to have. (Enterprise – medium: #1)

- If a profile is brought in at the beginning as part of the overall employment package—the worker can be continually assessed against it and action can be taken to implement further training or even lay the worker off if unsatisfactory. At the moment we can't say a person is not competent because we have nothing to match them against. (Enterprise – small: #5)
- If a profile is to be of maximum use it should list tasks—it should be broken down as much as possible. (Group training scheme: #4)
- Workplace competency profiles would have a lot of acceptance from employers because they would enable people to be better judged on merit. (Union: #2)

Assessment in the workplace

Several interviewees saw workplace competency profiles being useful as an aid to assessment of competencies in the workplace for classification and wage level purposes. One added that ranges and levels would need to be included in workplace competency profiles if used for this:

- Could be used [for assessing competency in the workplace] and also for identifying levels for determination of pay rates. New standards will more clearly identify an electrical worker's AQF level: for example, they will identify whether the worker is qualified to work on basic or complex circuits. Thus the range and level will need to be stated for competencies in the profile if the profile is to be used for determination of rates of pay. (Union: #1)
- Yes, workplace competency profiles would be very useful for assessment in the workplace. At the moment [our] enterprise bargaining agreements have got a three-month probationary period, [but] it is an area in which it is grey as to what they have got to achieve. Individual companies are saying we want you to be able to do this or that, but it is too vague—some sort of profile would be very handy. (Employer association: #3)
- Appropriate workplace competency profiles could save a lot of work if built into our company's system which will all be computerised. [i.e. a cross-referenced records system, training system, wages system, etc.]. (Enterprise – large: #6)
- Workplace competency profiles would certainly be useful for training needs analysis or reclassification purposes. (Enterprise – large: #5)
- If it is for a company's own internal purposes, like review of salaries, then I would say [it would be of some] use. (Employer association: #1)

One enterprise which was using workplace competency profiles for assessment of competencies in the workplace had struck some difficulty. Employees, through enterprise bargaining, had insisted that some competencies be judged on a team rather than an individual basis:

- It will be more difficult than it could have been, however, because of the requirement that some competencies be judged on a team rather than individual basis. It is not as easy to identify a performance deficiency and provide assistance to a team if it is an individual that is the source of the problem and needs help. (Enterprise – medium: #5)

Limited value to small enterprises

Two employers felt that workplace competency profiles would be less likely to be used for assessment purposes by small employers:

- I would not generally use a workplace competency profile [for assessment in the workplace]. In most cases you would just look at the results being obtained by the employee in his work. (Enterprise – small: #4)
- Workplace competency profiles could be useful, but I'm not sure that the small business would take the time to do it—in a small business, the less paperwork the better. (Enterprise – medium: #2)

However, not all small employers would be unlikely to use workplace competency profiles for assessment:

- It was one of the main reasons we are interested in [participating in] this research project. This would be the core purpose for using workplace competency profiles. (Enterprise – small: #3)

Summary of responses

Interviewees who were not directly involved in training generally felt that workplace competency profiles could be quite useful in training and assessment both on and off the job, most saying they would be moderately to extremely useful. Once again, larger enterprises were seen as more likely than smaller ones to see value in workplace competency profiles for these purposes.

The most commonly nominated applications for these profiles in training were analysis of training needs and development of training programs. Also mentioned were recognition of prior learning, determination of job levels for wages purposes and training for multi-skilling.

If workplace competency profiles were to be useful for assessment purposes, they would need to contain sufficient detail about the competencies—particularly regarding their performance criteria and range of application.

9.4 How useful are workplace competency profiles in training and assessment? (Interviewees answering from a training perspective)

Like the previous question, this was designed to find out how interviewees viewed the usefulness of workplace competency profiles in relation to training. However, this time it was directed to those involved in the planning and provision of training. Most of these interviewees indicated that they had seen few, if any workplace competency profiles from enterprises. In some cases, interviewees were not familiar with workplace competency profiles actually being used, either within their organisations or in the workplace. They were invited to comment instead on how useful a profile like the sample might be.

After a general introductory question on the topic, interviewees were asked how useful workplace competency profiles were (or could be):

- in analysing workplace training needs

- in selecting training modules to meet industry or employer requirements
- as a benchmark against which to monitor trainee performance and recognise prior learning
- as a aid to the development of training curricula

The following is a summary of their responses.

General usefulness of workplace competency profiles in training (introductory question)

Value of workplace competency profiles in individualised training plans and training agreements

In generally discussing the use of workplace competency profiles in training and assessment, two interviewees commented on their value in relation to the trend towards individualised training plans and training agreements:

- Workplace competency profiles tie in very nicely with the training packages being developed—we are likely to be moving more and more into individual training plans. (Industry training body: #6)
- Workplace competency profiles will form the basis for training agreements . . . (TAFE – State authority: #1)

Better employer understanding of training concepts and communication with training providers

Several interviewees felt that many employers were likely to have difficulty understanding the new training arrangements and the obligations they entail. They saw workplace competency profiles as being of assistance to employers—both as a means of helping them understand the training concepts and requirements, and as a means of clearer communication between them and the training provider.

- Workplace competency profiles might assist the small business person who generally has no idea of what is meant by a training plan—anything which can be done to help has got to be good. (Industry training body: #6)
- Over the years we have found that employers will make a general request for training and when you get down to the 'nuts and bolts' of what they want, they don't really know. A workplace competency profile like the sample would be really useful. The concept of a workplace competency profile to help [us] develop training would go a lot further than the equivalent of a basic job advertisement. (TAFE – institute: #1)
- Many employers are not going to be able to uphold their part of the bargain for trainees—they haven't had apprentices in the past, and if their training is monitored as is proposed, some of them are going to be in trouble. They are also going to find it hard to spare the time to organise training programs. They will probably call in established expert training providers to do it—in which case workplace competency profiles are going to play an important role. (TAFE – institute: #3)
- A workplace competency profile would be very useful for all aspects of training provided it contained enough detail. [It] could be a useful

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communication tool between employer and trainer. (Private training provider: #3)

Training providers may lead the industry in acceptance of workplace competency profiles

Because of their familiarity with the new training arrangements and requirements, training providers, as a group, are more likely to see benefits in using workplace competency profiles and will therefore be more prepared to accept them. One interviewee warns that it could be a long while before workplace competency profiles gain equivalent acceptance by the rest of industry:

- Training providers would accept [workplace competency profiles] most quickly because they would be seen as an essential instrument. As industry and organisations became more familiar with them, which may take years, they would then also come to use them. (Industry training body: #5)

There is one way in which employers and others outside the training establishments may be persuaded to accept and use workplace competency profiles. This is to highlight the profiles as a means of influencing the directions and content of training. For example, employers could be encouraged and assisted (by their employer associations and industry training boards) to draw up workplace competency profiles to an agreed format. Their employer associations (such as NECA for the electrical contracting industry) could then gather and use them to present a picture to ITABs and training authorities of the competencies enterprises are actually seeking in their employees.

By using workplace competency profiles in this way, employers could not only provide valuable information on the training actually needed by the workplace but also have a more effective voice in its development. Of course, for these profiles to be of most value in this context, they should be based on industry competency standards.

Use of workplace competency profiles in analysing training needs of the workplace

The 23 interviewees who responded to the training provider questionnaire were asked to comment on how useful workplace competency profiles were, (or could be, if not already in use) for analysing training needs of workplaces. They were also invited to rate their overall response on a scale provided. The following is a summary of ratings received.

Table 9.4.1: Usefulness of workplace competency profiles for analysing training needs of workplaces: Interviewees directly involved in training.

	No use at all	A little use	Moderately useful	Very useful	Extremely useful	TOTAL
TAFE authority				2	1	3
TAFE institute			1	1	2	4
Private training provider				3	1	4
Employer organisation			1			1
Industry training body		1			1	2
Union				1		1
Trainer : large enterprise			1		1	2
TOTAL		**1**	**3**	**7**	**6**	**17**

Increasing role for workplace competency profiles in TAFE training in the workplace

Several training institution interviewees pointed out that TAFE institutions were becoming more involved in providing enterprise-specific training—a process in which workplace competency profiles could play a valuable role.

- ❖ TAFE is moving towards providing training in the workplace and [training] designs for particular enterprises. Workplace competency profiles would undoubtedly help in development of training programs. A workplace competency profile is the place we have to start from to analyse skills and therefore the training needed. (TAFE – institute: #3)
- ❖ Workplace competency profiles might assist the small business person who generally has no idea of what is meant by a training plan. (Industry training body: #6)
- ❖ [Our] institutes are being told they are going to have to be more directly involved with employers in customising courses for them. With that in mind, workplace competency profiles like the sample would be terrific—they give you something to start from and relate to. [They] would speed up the development of the training programs. (TAFE – institute: #1)

Workplace competency profiles must contain sufficient detail to be of value

Once again, the training providers mentioned the need for workplace competency profiles to carry sufficient detail if they were to be of value to them:

- ❖ The sample [workplace competency profile] is fairly generic. But if an enterprise produced an enterprise-specific one you could build up a specific training program. (TAFE – institute: #5)
- ❖ [A workplace competency profile would be] very useful provided it contained enough detail. (Private training provider: #3)
- ❖ We have used them for this, provided they have sufficient detail. (TAFE – State authority: #3)

Use of workplace competency profiles in selecting appropriate modules of training

When asked to rate the usefulness of workplace competency profiles in selecting modules of training to suit industry or enterprise requirements, a similar pattern to that for analysing training needs emerged.

Table 9.4.2: Usefulness of workplace competency profiles for selecting training modules to meet enterprise requirements: Interviewees directly involved in training

	No use at all	A little use	Moderately useful	Very useful	Extremely useful	TOTAL
TAFE authority				2	1	3
TAFE institute			1	1	2	4
Private training provider			1	2	1	4
Employer organisation			1			1
Industry training body		1		1		2
Union				1		1
Trainer :large enterprise			1	1		2
TOTAL		1	4	8	4	17

Workplace competency profiles as a help to TAFE in selecting training

TAFE interviewees could see benefits in using workplace competency profiles to select the most appropriate modules of training:

- . . . a workplace competency profile is a good thing to have in front of you because it describes what a trained person should be expected to know. If an employer gave the institute a workplace competency profile as a guide to what a person needs to do on the job then the institute could build up a training program—for sure . . . If employers were more specific about what they expect an employee to do, then they could have some influence on the curriculum. (TAFE – institute: #5)
- If an employer came to TAFE with a profile of what their employees needed it would be a bonus. At the moment the training needs are being met by the breadth of modules offered, but training would be enhanced if employers identified special areas of need such as particular PLC programs. [We have] actually helped employers develop workplace competency profiles. Often, employers don't have much in writing, they just work off standards and curricula—they just say something like 'we want module number 130, but it must be based on or use the equipment we have'. Workplace competency profiles could be extremely useful [as an alternative to this,] if they were job specific or enterprise specific. (TAFE – institute: #2)
- There have been occasions when, as a TAFE teacher, I have been asked to design training for a particular organisation and have had nothing to work with. We then had to resort to a needs-analysis approach which wasn't very cost effective or time effective. A workplace competency profile would help TAFE tailor the training to meet the needs of a particular enterprise. Workplace competency profiles would not so much standardise an approach to training provision as provide direction. (TAFE – State authority: #2)

Use of workplace competency profiles for selecting training by enterprise trainer

A trainer from a large company described how the company used workplace competency profiles for this purpose:

- [A] particular section or department [of the company] tells the training section via a workplace competency profile what is needed and training is [then] designed to match the needs. [Trainer – large employer: #3]

Use of workplace competency profiles for selecting training by private training provider

A private training provider, who provides training for people seeking employment, made an interesting observation. This was that if job descriptions along the lines of workplace competency profiles were available to job seekers, it would make the task of providing appropriate training to equip people for particular jobs much easier.

- Wouldn't it be great to actually have job descriptions that are sent out to individuals [seeking training for employment] that match training institution information. Then there would be an easy process of matching the training required to the job in question. (Private training provider: #2)

Use of workplace competency profiles as benchmarks for monitoring or assessing workplace performance

Interviewees who responded to the training provider questionnaire were asked to comment on how useful workplace competency profiles were, or could be, as benchmarks against which competence of trainees could be assessed. They were also asked to gauge their effectiveness as reference documents which identify the areas in which assessment is to take place. In addition, interviewees were invited to comment on the usefulness of workplace competency profiles in recognition of prior learning. The following pattern of responses was obtained when the interviewees were invited to rate generally the overall usefulness of workplace competency profiles for these purposes.

Table 9.4.3: Usefulness of workplace competency profiles as a benchmark or reference for assessment, including recognition of prior learning: Interviewees directly involved in training

	No use at all	A little use	Moderately useful	Very useful	Extremely useful	TOTAL
TAFE authority				2	1	3
TAFE institute			1	1	2	4
Private training provider				2	2	4
Employer organisation		1				1
Industry training body		1	1			2
Union			1			1
Trainer large enterprise			1		1	2
TOTAL		2	4	5	6	17

Use of workplace competency profiles in assessment by private training providers

As the table shows, TAFE and private training providers were particularly appreciative of the benefits workplace competency profiles offered in relation to assessment:

- If we don't do this we will just be running a race while shifting the goal posts—which has been the tradition in the past. At least now—with the profiles—we will have a framework to work to. We will know if a person has satisfied the agreement. (TAFE – State authority: #1)
- Workplace competency profiles would be helpful for this. We are moving more that way now we have competency-based training and performance-based assessment. We are now bringing RPL into it—benchmarks are used for this. (TAFE – institute: #4)
- Workplace competency profiles are necessary and extremely useful—if written properly. [We] must have something like this. (Private training provider: #1)

Grouping of competencies in workplace competency profiles: An aid to assessment

One of these interviewees went on to point out that workplace competency profiles offered the advantage of conveniently grouping sets of competencies so they could be assessed together rather than independently. Thus workplace competency profiles could encourage and facilitate holistic assessment:

- [Workplace competency profiles] could be used for development of assessment instruments—competencies can be grouped to allow holistic assessment rather than be assessed in isolation. (TAFE – State authority: #1)

Workplace competency profiles help employers understand on-the-job assessment

Another interviewee thought workplace competency profiles offered a means of helping employers better understand the concept of on-the-job assessment:

- Once assessment strategies are developed for the on-job component of a competence, workplace competency profiles might be useful in helping the employers understand what it is about. (Industry training body: #3)

Use of workplace competency profiles in writing competency-based industrial awards

Several interviewees saw workplace competency profiles as potentially useful in writing competency-based industrial awards or in determining the levels of employees in relation to awards—which, of course, involves assessment of competency. One stated:

- [Workplace competency profiles] could be useful in an industrial relations area in writing competency-based awards. They would be very useful to industrial advocates or union organisers. (Industry training body: #2)

Similarities between workplace competency profiles and training logbooks

In answering the question, some interviewees referred to training records and logbooks. There certainly appear to be a number of common features between training records, logbooks and workplace competency profiles suggesting that the latter could possibly be used as a basis for these records:

- I have not seen many workplace competency profiles yet—however, structured logbooks are being introduced which are a sort of workplace competency profile. We have been using open ones which do not specify what should be covered. Structured ones say what should be covered. (Industry training body: #6)
- The Utilities Industry Training Board is looking at having a national profile for electricians against which people can be compared during their training to see where they are at. Victoria is trialling a swipe card system for recording work done towards competencies—once a month the swipe card record is sent in to a central agency where it is matched against a profile—they are looking at doing it nationally. (TAFE – institute: #3)

In this context, it is also worth mentioning a comment from one of the interviewees not directly involved in training:

- [Our] profiles are formally stated on paper in the form of skills competency logs. One logbook has to cover all four years for [each of]: heavy construction, domestic, and service sector electrical apprenticeships—so there may not be an exact match to company requirements. Separate logbooks would be nice but resources do not allow them to be drawn up, plus, in group training, apprentices move from one type of employer to another, so the logbooks would have to be very big to cover everything. (Group training scheme: #3)

One wonders whether each employer could have a workplace competency profile based on an agreed common format, the content of which could be adapted to each enterprise's needs. An apprentice's progress could then be signed off against each competency and the profiles from the various employers bound into a folder to make up a logbook.

Workplace competency profiles and recognition of prior learning

Workplace competency profiles could also have application in the RPL process. They could be useful to RPL assessors as a tool; firstly, to help identify to RPL applicants the competencies for which recognition might be obtained; and secondly, to explain the requirements which must be met.

- A workplace competency profile gives you a means of measuring outcomes. It is useful for RPL-assessing a person who comes into the organisation from outside. A workplace competency profile is a basis for identifying competencies and making a judgement. (Trainer – large employer: #1)

Use of workplace competency profiles in developing curricula

In this question, interviewees directly involved in training were asked about the application of workplace competency profiles in developing curricula. As in previous questions, they were asked to provide a generalised assessment using a given scale. This provided the following result.

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Table 9.4.4: Usefulness of workplace competency profiles in designing curricula

	No use at all	A little use	Moderately useful	Very useful	Extremely useful	TOTAL
TAFE authority				2	1	3
TAFE institute				3	2	5
Private training provider				2	2	4
Secondary school					1	1
Employer organisation	1					1
Industry training body			1	1	1	3
Union			1			1
Trainer: large enterprise					1	1
TOTAL	**1**		**2**	**8**	**8**	**19**

Positive outcomes of use of workplace competency profiles in curriculum design

All interviewees who provided comments on this aspect saw positive outcomes from the use of workplace competency profiles in curriculum design. The following are some of the general responses:

- Yes, we will be using workplace competency profiles for [designing curricula]. But we talk of *training programs* or *packages* rather than curricula these days. (TAFE – State authority: #1)
- Even the sample workplace competency profile from an employer, as it stands, would be very useful for curriculum design. (Private training provider: #2)
- Our board of studies works in liaison with industry. Workplace competency profiles would be extremely useful [for curriculum design]. (School project officer: #1)

The one interviewee who indicated 'no use at all' in table 9.4.4 did not provide any additional comment on this aspect. (However, the fact that he indicated they would be of some value in the other applications previously discussed suggests he just did not see any value in this particular context.)

Enabling employers to influence curricula

One interviewee saw workplace competency profiles as a means of enabling employers to influence training curricula:

- If employers were more specific about what they expect an employee to do, then they could have some influence on the curriculum. (TAFE – institute: #5)

Influence of workplace competency profiles on the process of curriculum development

Two interviewees saw the application of workplace competency profiles as contributing toward the proper process of curriculum development—a process in which development of industry competency standards precedes development of the associated curricula.

- Yes, [workplace competency profiles] would be useful in designing curricula because the standards should be established and available before the curriculum is written. It happened the other way round with the contracting industry and hence led to problems. (Union: #1)
- I don't think there is any doubt that workplace competency profiles would be useful for designing and implementing training . . . The one problem we still have is that the curriculum [TAFE colleges] are still using was developed before the competency standards were developed. There has been a lot of work done in recent times in re-jigging the curriculum to make sure it covers all aspects . . . Use of workplace competency profiles would be in line with the way it should be—a competency statement is established, then around that comes underpinning knowledge, curriculum and assessment procedures. (Group training scheme: #1)

Contribution to link between enterprise needs and industry competency standards

Another interviewee saw the use of properly constructed workplace competency profiles in curriculum design as contributing to a link between enterprise needs and industry competency standards.

- Hopefully, enterprises will be translating enterprise needs into competency statements in terms of industry competency standards—so workplace competency profiles will meet industry standards. Then the workplace competency profile-based training will be tailored to enterprise needs and meet industry standards. (Industry training body: #6)

However, he went on to warn that, if an extended number of curricula (and training programs) result from changes now taking place (including the possible impact of workplace competency profiles), this could cause difficulty to training providers in filling classes and meeting training demands:

- . . . it is already difficult to get training providers to provide training to meet the existing prescribed training curriculum due to lack of students and other reasons—a plethora of training curricula to meet the needs of many enterprises could be a huge headache. More training on the job could be one way round it. (Industry training body: #6)

Who in the training organisation will use workplace competency profiles?

If workplace competency profiles are going to play an important part in the development and implementation of training, it is important that their design and application should take into account the needs of the training providers who are to use them. With this in mind, interviewees directly involved in training were asked who in their organisation would be most likely to use workplace competency profiles.

Interviewees from four TAFE organisations and a secondary school felt that it would generally fall either to the institution-based program managers or the teaching staff responsible for training in the relevant subject area. It was interesting to note that the responsibility for using workplace competency profiles would be that of staff in the institutions rather than in a central curriculum unit. Three interviewees who were responsible for training provision in large companies also responded to this question. In their responses, human resource managers or human resource staff were mentioned twice, line managers or supervisors were mentioned twice, and technical training co-ordinator was mentioned once.

Summary of responses

The majority of interviewees who were involved in training saw workplace competency profiles as moderately to extremely useful in training. They were seen as useful because: they could: help employers gain a better understanding of training concepts; improve communication between enterprises and training providers; and assist enterprises to influence training curricula to better meet their needs.

Workplace competency profiles were also seen as a means of facilitating development of individual training plans—by TAFE as well as by private training providers—to suit the particular needs of enterprises, individual employees, and job seekers.

9.5 How closely do workplace competency profiles match industry competency standards?

If competencies are defined in accordance with industry competency standards, it has been suggested that workplace competency profiles, too, should reflect those standards in order to achieve uniformity and wide acceptance across industry. This question, which was only asked in the enterprise-based questionnaire, was intended to find out how closely the workplace competency profiles already in use matched the competency standards set by industry.

Only a few interviewees were familiar with workplace competency profiles actually in use. Because of this, the question generally reverted to the fall-back version which asked how well they thought the *sample* profile matched industry competency standards. Because the sample profile was largely based on proposed generic competency standards soon to be introduced to the electrical industry, it is not surprising that many interviewees felt there was a close match.

Table 9.5.1 summarises the scaled responses given for both the sample workplace competency profile (15 responses) and the organisations' own workplace competency profiles (six responses).

Sample workplace competency profile: A generic profile

In commenting on the sample workplace competency profile, some interviewees made the observation that it was a generic profile and therefore contained competencies that some employers would not want. This aspect is dealt with in more detail in the next section. The following is a cross-section of comments:

- ❖ The sample workplace competency profile certainly is along the lines of what industry would expect . . . it certainly covers everything you would be after. (Enterprise – large: #1)

Table 9.5.1: **Match of sample workplace competency profile (upper left corner of cells) or own/other workplace competency profile (lower right corner of cells) to industry competency standards: interviewees not directly involved in training**

Sample WCP / Other WCP	Hardly at all	A little	Fairly well	Very closely	Almost exactly	TOTAL
Enterprise: large			2 /	1 /		3 /
medium				2 /	/ 2	2 / 2
small			3 /	2 /		5 /
Employer organisation		/ 1	1 /	/ 1		1 / 2
Group training scheme			2 / 1		/ 1	2 / 2
Industry training body					1 /	1 /
Union				1 /		1 /
TOTAL		/ 1	8 / 1	6 / 1	1 / 3	15 / 6

- The sample workplace competency profile seems to be a broad range document. It would be pretty close to what the industry wants. (Enterprise – small: #3)
- In some regards, the sample workplace competency profile does match industry competency standards reasonably well, however, there are some things in it which do not directly relate to industry competency standards—such as *awareness of, and ability to use up-to-date technology* and *use initiative*—these are not specific units, they are inherent in the other competencies. (Group training scheme: #1)
- [The sample workplace competency profile matches industry competency standards . . .] very closely [although] there is a lot in it to do with personal skills. (Enterprise – small: #4)

Match of enterprise workplace competency profiles to industry competency standards

Several interviewees who commented on the match of their own workplace competency profiles to industry competency standards attributed the close match to the fact that their profiles were based on the industry standards.

- [Our workplace competency profiles are] a fairly close match. They are partly based on industry standards. (Group training scheme: #3)
- Profiles used by the company match the industry standards almost exactly . . . [they are] modelled on the standards (Enterprise – medium: #1)
- All areas are covered because [our] workplace competency profiles are based on industry standards. (Enterprise – large: #3)

One noted that the match was not particularly close because the company profiles were very specific—a bit too specific in his opinion.

- [The company workplace competency profiles only match industry standards] a little because the thrust of the profiles is on specific job criteria [such as] actual equipment worked on, whereas the electrical contracting standards are more industry based with range statements, etc. [The company] profiles are a bit too specific—it would be better now to make them a bit more generic like those of electrical contracting. (Enterprise – large: #5)

Do enterprise workplace competency profiles exceed industry competency standards?

As a follow-on question, interviewees were asked to comment on any areas in which their own workplace competency profiles or workplace requirements exceeded those specified in the industry competency standards.

- Electricians in many States are now expected to test out [self-test] their own work for correct installation and operation and issue a certificate of compliance. Perhaps this should be added to the sample workplace competency profile. Number 17 [on the profile] *test apparatus and associated basic circuits*, could cover it if we extended it to include issue of a certificate of compliance where required. (Enterprise – small: #4)
- [We are] probably working to higher standards. This has been forced on to us by the needs of our customers, particularly overseas companies—and to get access to the South East Asian market and the defence market. (Enterprise – large: #4)

Several interviewees noted that multi-skilling resulted in workplace competency profiles that exceeded the requirements set out in the sample workplace competency profile.

- Our power-line workers are a lot more multi-skilled than any others in Australia. We start with national competency standards as a base or minimum standard, then develop more specific [company] ones on top of them. Our minimum standards are already higher than the generic standards. (Enterprise – large: #6)
- There most definitely are areas of higher or more extensive standards [in the company]—partly because electrical contracting has not touched the areas of multi-skilling. So in the vehicle industry there are areas such as welding, machining and quality assurance—and participative work practices, like communication, leadership, quality circles, etc. which are entrenched in the profiles in the industry. Attitudinal stuff is all part of it—the standards don't touch that. (Enterprise – large: #5)
- Our companies are becoming more involved in data cabling. We would probably strengthen this area. (Group training scheme: #2)

The sample workplace competency profile: More than what an average employee does?

One interviewee observed that it was unlikely that a typical electrician would be competent in all the competencies listed in the sample workplace competency profile:

> ❖ However, very few, if any, level 5 electricians, that is, licensed tradespersons, would be competent in all the competencies which could be expected of them as specified in the standards. Many of the electricians coming back to do refresher courses to enable them to sign work off, as they are now expected to do, are being found to be lacking in the fundamentals. We would not realistically expect any one employee to be competent in everything because the company has various employees covering various aspects of the job. (Enterprise – large: #3)

Summary of responses

Those who commented on their enterprises' own workplace competency profiles generally felt they matched or exceeded industry competency standards. Some stated this was due, at least in part, to the profiles being based on industry competency standards. Sometimes, enterprise workplace competency profiles exceeded industry competency standards. Then, it was generally because of the inclusion of special electrical competencies needed in the job or, in some cases, the inclusion of competencies from other industry sectors for the purpose of multi-skilling.

The sample workplace competency profile was viewed by some as a generic profile. It was also suggested that a typical electrical mechanic would be unlikely to be truly competent in all the competencies listed in it.

9.6 How closely do workplace competency profiles match enterprise requirements?

A workplace competency profile specifies the competencies required of an employee in a particular job or section of industry. If a profile is going to be of any value to an enterprise, therefore, it will need to match the enterprise requirements—to specify the competencies the enterprise requires.

This question was designed to find out how closely the workplace competency profiles already in use matched what employees were actually expected to do on the job. As was the case for the previous question, many of the interviewees were unable to refer to workplace competency profiles actually in use. Instead, they commented on how closely the sample profile matched what the enterprise expected. The question was only asked in the enterprise-based questionnaire.

As part of their answer, interviewees were invited to give a general estimation of the degree of matching using a scale provided. Table 9.6.1 summarises the scaled responses given for both the sample workplace competency profile (12 responses) and the enterprise workplace competency profiles (nine responses). Not surprisingly, the enterprise-designed profiles were seen to be a better match to actual job requirements than was the sample profile.

Table 9.6.1: Match of sample workplace competency profile (upper left corner of cells) or own/other workplace competency profile (lower right corner of cells) to company requirements: Interviewees not directly involved in training

Sample WCP Other WCP	Hardly at all	A little	Fairly well	Very closely	Almost exactly	TOTAL
Enterprise: large			1 1	1 1	1	3 2
medium		1	1	1	 2	3 2
small			2	2		4
Employer organisation			1			1
Group training scheme			 2	 1	 1	 4
Industry training body			 1			 1
Union				1		1
TOTAL		**1**	**5** **4**	**5** **2**	**1** **3**	**12** **9**

Sample workplace competency profile perceived to be broad

In their comments, some interviewees felt the sample workplace competency profile was rather broad and that modifications would be needed to obtain a closer match to actual workplace requirements:

- Some of it is pretty broad, such as *test apparatus and associated [basic] circuits*—you need to read into it. (Enterprise – small: #4)
- [The sample profile] would be pretty close to what the company requires—except that it would not include the scaffolding competency—[we would] get scaffolding people in to do this. (Enterprise – medium: #4)
- Most of what is in the profile is academic in the sense that it is not physical work—it is also too broad. Competency number 16 [*Install and connect fixed wired electrical apparatus*] can cover a multitude of things; fixed apparatus can be switchboards, motors, fans, or light fittings. The workplace competency profile would need to be more specific to the type of work done by the employee and the small business. (Enterprise – medium: #2)
- The sample is a close match for electrical mechanics outside [the organisation]. For use within [the organisation] it would be quite good, broadly speaking, but would require some minor changes like remove a few [competencies] which aren't particularly relevant (numbers 13, 14 & 15 on the sample workplace competency profile were cited) and insert a couple which are. (Enterprise – large: #2)
- The profile is accurate for an electrical mechanic, but the average business is not going to require their electrical mechanics to do all of the competencies listed, and the mix will differ depending on the workplace. It is likely that employers will want to customise the profiles to suit their own workplaces. (Employer association: #1)

However, one interviewee could see benefit in not allowing workplace competency profiles to become too specific:

- . . . companies would want the workplace competency profile to be equipment or apparatus specific. [But this is] not a good idea—a more functional type of approach would be better to allow for constant updating of technology. (Union: #2)

. . . but, broad workplace competency profiles have their place

A country interviewee pointed out that because of the isolation, enterprises in the country need to be able to cope with a wider range of jobs than do most city enterprises. Consequently, their employees need a broader set of competencies.

- Sample workplace competency profile seems to be a broad-range document. From the point of view of a company just starting in this area—it looks excellent. It could be adapted to suit [our] company's needs quite easily. Unlike the city contractors, the country contractors need to be much broader in their competencies—need to be able to do a wide range of things. (Enterprise – small: #3)

A group training interviewee also saw a need for broad based workplace competency profiles, describing how they needed to use profiles which catered for a wide range of employers:

- . . . but [our profiles] may not go into as much as a company specialising in one area would want. [They] are designed to cater for the broad cross section of employers we deal with. (Group training scheme: #4)

Match between enterprise workplace competency profiles and enterprise requirements

Not surprisingly, the few interviewees who were able to comment on the match between their enterprise workplace competency profiles and enterprise requirements generally felt there was, at least, a reasonable match. But, interestingly, of the nine interviewees who responded in terms of their enterprise's own workplace competency profile, only three felt they *almost exactly* matched enterprise requirements and four of the remaining five felt they merely matched *fairly well*. They also provided some interesting insights.

One commented on the need for updating:

- [Our workplace competency profiles] are pretty close [to our company's needs] now, but will have to be updated to keep pace with the rapid change in technology in this industry—especially the control side. (Enterprise – medium: #1)

Another confirmed that the difference between what the workplace competency profiles required and what the employees were actually doing highlighted the need for training:

- Workplace competency profiles represent what the company wants ideally. The difference [between what the workplace competency profile states and what the employees are doing] is due to the identified skills gaps. (Enterprise – medium: #5)

And a third pointed out that the close match between the workplace competency profiles and what the employees were doing was:

- . . . because the profiles were based on what they were already doing . . . this is the ideal way to tackle it. (Enterprise – large: #5)

Summary of responses

The sample workplace competency profile was seen by some as being fairly broad and therefore needing to be made more specific to suit individual enterprise needs. However, broad workplace competency profiles were preferred in some instances, particularly by rural enterprises and group training schemes. Interviewees generally saw either their own workplace competency profiles, or the sample profile, as being a fair to good match to their enterprise requirements.

It was suggested that, if employees were not meeting requirements specified in enterprise specific workplace competency profiles, this could be indicative of a need for training. It was also noted that the rapid pace of technological change might make it necessary for workplace competency profiles, particularly enterprise-specific ones, to be frequently updated.

9.7 How closely do curricula/programs match workplace competency profiles?

If workplace competency profiles reflect the competencies which enterprises, and therefore industry, want and if training also matches what industry wants, there should be a corresponding match between workplace competency profiles and the curricula and training programs offered by training providers.

In the previous question, interviewees responding from an enterprise perspective were asked about the match between workplace competency profiles and their enterprise requirements. In this question, interviewees directly involved in training were asked how closely they thought their curricula and training programs matched workplace competency profiles. Where interviewees had not seen enough workplace competency profiles to form an opinion, they were instead asked to comment on the match of their curricula and programs to the sample profile.

As part of their answer, interviewees were invited to give a general estimation of the degree of match using a scale provided. Table 9.7.1 summarises the scaled responses given both for the sample workplace competency profile (two responses) and workplace competency profiles actually in use (eight responses).

Interviewees raised several interesting points in their accompanying comments on this issue.

Table 9.7.1: **Match of curricula and training programs to sample workplace competency profile (upper left corner of cells) or actual (enterprise) workplace competency profile (lower right corner of cells): Interviewees directly involved in training**

Sample WCP Other WCP	Hardly at all	A little	Fairly well	Very closely	Almost exactly	TOTAL
TAFE authority		 1			1 	1 1
TAFE institute			 1		1 	1 1
Private training provider				 2	 1	 3
Secondary school						
Employer organisation						
Industry training body			 1			 1
Union						
Trainer: large enterprise			 1	 1		 2
TOTAL		 1	 3	 3	2 1	2 8

Purpose-designed training can match enterprise workplace competency profiles

Two private providers stated that, because their training was designed to meet the needs of individual enterprises, the match was very good:

- . . . curricula and training programs match workplace competency profiles almost perfectly because they are purpose designed to match enterprise requirements. (Private training provider: #2)
- Training is designed for individual enterprises—so [our] workplace competency profiles and training match closely. (Private training provider: #1)

Curricula cannot cover all workplace competency profile requirements

However, other interviewees pointed out that a training curriculum often cannot provide all the training necessary for competencies specified in a workplace competency profile, because some complementary training in the workplace is necessary:

- In some industries, such as hospitality, it is possible to do a TAFE course and come out workplace competent because they can provide true on-job training in training restaurants etc. This is not possible in engineering and applied technologies—the concept can become very expensive. You cannot provide a simulated workplace with sufficient opportunity for day to day contingencies. So, in electrical, the training is clearly a partnership between the employer and the off-job training provider. Off-job training provides underpinning knowledge and base skills. On-job, with the employer, is under real workplace conditions and with various levels of supervision—in which the supervision becomes less as the person becomes more competent. (TAFE – State authority: #3)

- [The curriculum] can't cover every aspect of what is required of employees—it gives the broad basics which are complemented by on-job experience. (Trainer – large employer: #3)

Another mentioned the practical difficulties in providing training which is comprehensive enough to fully cover each of the competencies specified in a workplace competency profile:

- The numbers [of students] in courses are pretty small—so the students do a common course wherever possible, designed to meet licensing requirements. The courses match workplace needs so far as the core* competencies go (which are required for licensing) but there are limits to how much can be done to meet individual enterprise needs. (TAFE – institute: #3)

  [* The interviewee is speaking here of the seven *technical* core competencies often referred to in the electrical industry: (1) install electrical equipment, (2) install electrical wiring systems, (3) test and connect electrical installations. (4) diagnose and repair faults in electrical equipment, (5) Respond to breakdown in electrical equipment, (6) Maintain electrical equipment and, (7) Decommission electrical equipment.]

More work on matching is required

Two interviewees suggested more work needed to be done to ensure a better match between training and workplace competency profile requirements:

- Work needs to be done in this area to provide a better match between actual on-job competencies required and training. (Private training provider: #3)
- . . . at present there is very little [match]—however, they must eventually match. A major review is required. (TAFE – State authority: #1)

As a follow-on question, interviewees were asked to indicate any areas in which their curricula or training programs exceeded the requirements of workplace profiles, or in which they failed to address some of the profile requirements.

Only one interviewee mentioned any example in which the curriculum or training programs exceeded workplace competency profile requirements:

- The curriculum only exceeds workplace competency profile requirements where [the company] is moving to multi-skilled apprentices across three trade areas. But they still reflect back to the original of each trade profile anyway. (Trainer – large employer: #1)

Workplace competency profile areas not currently addressed in curricula

Interviewees were also asked if there were any areas in workplace competency profiles which were not addressed by their curricula or training programs:

- The more cognitive skills, such as in *diagnosis and repair* and *respond to breakdown* are not very well addressed at the moment in our curriculum for the electrical trade. Perhaps workplace competency profiles could help. (Group training scheme: #1)

- Some competencies may not be specifically addressed by a module but are covered in one or several modules—for example, *teamwork* would be covered indirectly in what is done in various modules. (Trainer – large employer: #2)
- . . . some of the key competencies are not taught off the job nor are some of the technical ones, like *commissioning procedures*—because we don't do big enough projects to allow them to be taught. They are taught on the job. (TAFE – institute: #5)

Problems in tailoring training to the organisation

Some interviewees indicated their organisations would extend their training programs where feasible:

- Provided a viable class can be formed, the institute offers other national modules outside of the prescribed courses to suit enterprise requirements—for example: AC motor speed control and DC motor speed control for the paper industry, and PLCs for the hydro-electric authority. (TAFE – institute: #3)

One went on to add that they were not always happy with the program of training dictated by an enterprise's workplace competency profile, but did their best to provide as much balance as they could:

- Even though we may have some concerns about the structure, we provide what is wanted. For example, in the case of one employer, [we] felt it would be desirable to have communication and team-building up front in the curriculum—but the employer did not want it and the workplace competency profile did not show it—so it was not provided. This sort of problem arises more with the key competencies, which employers see as soft feely stuff, as opposed to skills enhancement. Communication is often seen as management driven and not required by employees. We try to encourage employers to consider including training to cover the missing areas and, even if they do not formally include it, we include it to some degree in the training for technical competencies where relevant. (Private training provider: #2)

Trainer's role is important

Another interviewee highlighted the important role of the trainer in advising enterprises and arranging appropriate training:

- This is the subject of a national project, mapping modules to competencies. As enterprises are able to select competencies to meet their needs, there may be gaps in the training. It is here that the trainer comes to the fore in arranging packages that enable the gaps to be filled. (TAFE – State authority: #1)

Advantages of common workplace competency profiles

One TAFE representative believed a common set of workplace competency profiles could help promote uniformity of training. One might expect that this could also lead to closer matches between training and workplace competency profile requirements:

- Common workplace competency profiles could lead to more uniform training approaches across colleges. (TAFE – institute: #4)

Feedback is important

Finally, one interviewee suggested it was important that appropriate bodies should be notified of any discrepancies between training and workplace competency profiles so that action could be taken to remedy them:

- ❖ Discrepancies should be notified to the Utilities ITAB (national) or the State Electrical, Electrotechnology, Energy… Training Board (State). (Union: #1)

Summary of responses

Interviewees pointed out that in many industries, including electrical, curricula cannot normally be expected to cover all competencies specified in a workplace competency profile because of the difficulty (and therefore cost) in providing adequate training on the job.

Nevertheless, reasonably good matches should be possible in circumstances where: training is purpose designed to match an enterprise workplace competency profiles; there is good communication between the enterprise and training provider (a process in which the trainer can play an important part); and a satisfactory balance between trainee numbers and cost per trainee can be achieved.

9.8 Breadth of workplace competency profiles? How relevant are they across workplaces and industry sectors?

Interviewees responding to the enterprise questionnaire were asked how much of the workplace competency profiles they were using was relevant to other enterprises in their own area of the industry (such as electrical contracting). They were also asked how much was relevant to enterprises in areas of the electrical industry outside their own (for example, refrigeration/air conditioning if they were in electrical contracting).

Almost all interviewees who responded to this question rated both the sample workplace competency profile and, where they existed, their own enterprise's profiles, as largely or wholly relevant to other enterprises in their own area of the electrical industry. Even across different areas of the industry, interviewees generally felt there remained a fair degree of relevance.

Relevance of workplace competency profiles to other enterprises within the same area of the industry

Relevance of own profile to other enterprises in same area of industry

Most of those who responded in terms of their own workplace competency profiles felt that the profile they used would be at least partially relevant to other enterprises in their own area of the industry. The following is a sample of their comments:

- ❖ They should be almost identical with exception of something peculiar to the other company—for example if they use a different control system. (Enterprise – medium: #1)

- Although we have named types of machinery [in our workplace competency profiles], the control systems, the maintenance and service to the machines, are basically the same regardless of whether the machines are producing cars [in a car factory] or tyres [in a tyre factory]. (Enterprise – large: #5)
- In the service type area, most of the other organisations in [the city] would be pretty small, their workplace competency profiles would not be nearly as comprehensive—they probably would not contain much more than core competencies. [Our] workplace competency profiles would almost certainly match similar large service organisations elsewhere. (Enterprise – medium: #5)
- There would only be a core that was, say, 'transmissible' from one company to another—only about half of the profile—because they are employer-specific things being talked about, like particular makes of equipment. (Employer association: #3)

Some group training scheme representatives indicated that the workplace competency profiles they used were purposely designed to be broad so as to cater for the wide range of employers involved in the scheme:

- This [broad relevance] is what group training is directed towards. (Group training scheme: #3)
- [Our] profile is designed to cater for a wide range of employers. (Group training scheme: #4)

Relevance of sample profile to other enterprises in same area of industry

Those who responded in terms of the sample workplace competency profile also thought it would be widely relevant across their section of the industry. However, one interviewee commented that it would be unlikely that an individual would be truly competent in all the competencies listed.

- [The] sample workplace competency profile would allow employees to move easily within same [industry area]. (Enterprise – large: #1)
- If employees matched the sample profile, they would not have much trouble switching to another employer in the same [industry area]. (Enterprise – large: #2)
- It would be very rare to get someone who was truly competent in all of the things listed in the sample workplace competency profile, however, anyone who was . . . could easily move from one job to another. (Enterprise – medium: #4)
- An electrician in Holdens might do a lot of work on electric motors whereas we would not. However, an electrician, as part of training, covers electric motors anyway. If the sample [workplace competency profile] was changed a little bit to suit Holdens, even then it would only mean one small section would be irrelevant to us. In general the profiles would be very similar. (Enterprise – small: #4)
- Portability of the competencies specified in the workplace competency profile depends on how broadly the competencies are specified. If competencies are specified broadly then there is no problem—if they get too specific then the differences may be a problem. [Our training organisation] prefers training to broad competencies so that a worker can easily move between employers. (Group training scheme: #1)

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Relevance of workplace competency profiles to enterprises in different areas of the industry

When asked to comment on relevance of their own workplace competency profiles (or the sample) to industry areas outside their own, most interviewees generally felt there was a fair degree of relevance.

Relevance of own workplace competency profile to enterprises in other areas of the industry

The three who spoke of their own workplace competency profiles (both of whom were group training organisations) said:

- Across sectors there is still a lot of similarity. For example, [our organisation] uses sections of the electrical logbook [similar to a workplace competency profile] for air-conditioning and refrigeration mechanics. (Group training scheme: #3)
- Only some of the profile would be relevant outside the sectors it is designed to cover. (Group training scheme: #4)
- [Between companies in different sectors of the industry], for example, electrical contracting and the lift industry, there would be a lot less in common—but they would still have the generic skills to level 5. (Employer association: #3)

However, if the industry areas are too dissimilar then the cross-relevance of workplace competency profiles diminishes. One interviewee commented on the low relevance between competencies in the electronic manufacturing industry, and refrigeration or electrical contracting:

- No, you couldn't just move [from our electronics manufacturing area] into refrigeration, our area is too specific. Although in the Electrotechnology Manufacturing Certificate they all cover [things like] electrical fundamentals, DC principles and component testing—a lot of which is common to refrigeration and electrical contracting—it would be impractical for an average person to be proficient in the competencies across two areas like this. Just keeping up with the electronics industry is an exercise in itself. (Enterprise – large: #4)

Relevance of sample workplace competency profile to enterprises in other areas of the industry

The following are comments from those speaking of the sample workplace competency profile:

- Across sectors there would be a reasonably close match—competencies 11,12,15,16,17 [on the sample profile] would be the more critical ones which would need to be broad enough. (Enterprise – large: #1)
- . . . in the main the competencies and the whole approach [of the sample workplace competency profile] will be the same but the specifics will be different. (Union: #2)
- [The sample workplace competency profile] is . . . relevant to companies outside the field if we are just talking of the electrical competencies. (Enterprise – medium: #2)

- The sample workplace competency profile would cover the electrical aspects of other sectors of the industry reasonably well. (Group training scheme: #1)

Two interviewees referred to the need for extra training to compensate for differences:

- Differences from one sector to another (e.g. contracting – refrigeration) would require the worker to do further training. (Enterprise – small: #5)
- Even outside the sector or stream there would remain a lot of similarity, so there would only be a moderate amount of extra training required. (Industry training body: #4)

One drew attention to the importance of conformity with legislation in ensuring relevance across fields:

- Workplace competency profiles must be constructed in conformity with the national and State legislative requirements. This will have some bearing on portability and transferability. (TAFE – State authority: #1)

Extended workplace competency profiles

Another interviewee noted that employers may draw up workplace competency profiles which are designed to extend across areas within an industry. For instance: an employer could draw up a workplace competency profile which specifies the typical electrical mechanic competencies, but adds competencies relating to (say) linesperson, or instrumentation—and the employee could be paid a higher rate for the additional competencies. This idea could also be extended outside the sector, so that an electrical mechanic might also have competencies in (say) mechanical fitting.

Summary of responses

In general, interviewees speaking from an enterprise perspective felt that either the sample or an enterprise workplace competency profile could have fairly broad application to other enterprises within their area of the industry. Even outside their immediate area, it was thought there could still be reasonably broad application due to the common application of electrical principles.

It was also thought that electrical industry workplace competency profiles might have relevance outside the industry because there could still be competencies in common, such as for occupational health and safety and the application of common engineering processes.

9.9 Narrow, enterprise-specific, workplace competency profiles and their effects on individuals

In both the enterprise and training provider questionnaires, interviewees were asked how much they agreed with a proposition. This was that enterprise-based workplace competency profiles could be relatively job specific, leading to narrow training and thus limited prospects of subsequent employment for employees. The scaled responses to this question are shown in the tables below. Responses of interviewees answering from an enterprise standpoint (enterprise questionnaire) are given in table 9.9.1 and those of interviewees answering from a training standpoint (training provider questionnaire) in table 9.9.2.

Taken overall, the combined results clearly show that interviewees believed job-specific workplace competency profiles could lead to narrow training and limit the opportunities for employees to move between jobs. Comparison of the two tables suggests there was little difference between enterprise interviewees and training interviewees regarding the perceived likelihood of this happening.

Table 9.9.1: Extent of agreement with the proposition that training to enterprise workplace competency profiles could lead to narrow employee competency profiles: Interviewees responding to enterprise questionnaire

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	TOTAL
Enterprise: large				4		4
medium			1	2	1	4
small		1		1		2
Employer organisation			1	2		3
Group training scheme		1	2	1		4
Industry training body				1		1
Union					1	1
TOTAL		**2**	**4**	**11**	**2**	**19**

Table 9.9.2: Extent of agreement with the proposition that training to enterprise workplace competency profiles could lead to narrow employee competency profiles: Interviewees responding to training provider questionnaire

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	TOTAL
TAFE authority	1		1		1	3
TAFE institute				3	2	5
Private training provider			1	2		3
Secondary school				1		1
Employer organisation						
Industry training body			1	2	1	4
Union					1	1
Trainer: large enterprise				2		2
TOTAL	**1**		**3**	**10**	**5**	**19**

Defining the issue of narrow workplace competency profiles

This question generated a large number of comments from interviewees. Most comments supported the proposition that narrow workplace competency profiles and correspondingly narrow training could lead to problems for individuals (and, as one interviewee pointed out, long-term problems for the industry as well).

Narrow workplace competency profiles are not a new problem

The following comments suggest that jobs comprising narrow ranges of competencies already exist. Perhaps narrow workplace competency profiles will serve to signal the existence of such jobs rather than be the reason for their existence.

- This has always been a problem . . . [however, it] could only really become significant at the higher levels, that is, post-trade area and higher. (Industry training body: #4)
- Narrow work profiles have always been the case. This would be no more of a problem than at present. We already train for specific needs—for example, an employee trained by Queensland Rail would be useless to an electrical contractor or a supply authority. The system is now starting to recognise this problem and supplementary training is becoming available. In fact, workplace competency profiles would help employees identify additional training needed to move into another job. (Industry training body: #6)
- This already tends to happen in the manufacturing industry—a person is trained to work on one machine and cannot move to another one or another area without further training. This is a shortcoming of [the manufacturing industry] model. There is a danger that it could happen in the electrical industry if employers set narrow workplace competency profiles. (Employer association: #1)

Some examples of narrow workplace competency profiles

A number of interviewees gave actual examples to illustrate the nature of the problem. (Note: the repeated references to wiring of switchboards and control cabinets should not be taken as an indication that there is a high incidence of the problem in this section of the industry. It is likely that some of them arose from the fact that an example based on this was used in presenting the question.)

- Yes, narrow profiles are a problem and we have experienced it. We have electricians working in the steel-making section which is very different from the raw material section. To interchange them becomes very difficult. (Trainer – large employer: #3)
- . . . however, a lot of employers are moving towards establishing niche markets. There is an emerging problem of *streaming* in the electronics industry where specialisations are becoming narrower and making it difficult to draw up and conduct courses for narrow areas such as colour TV and business equipment. (Industry training body: #3)
- Industry should set the competencies required, employers should then match the job and training to the competencies required. Training providers who are trying to meet the needs of a client employer are under pressure to provide only what the employer wants, which may not meet industry requirements, in order to keep costs down. As a training provider, we are asked repeatedly to provide short courses of training for narrow groups of competencies. One employer recently wanted people to be trained to walk into control cabinets and press buttons—they need a hell of a lot more than that. If anyone provides that sort of training and then a certificate indicating they have been assessed as competent, they are taking a big risk [because the employee may not be competent in all the related competencies necessary for safety]. (Private training provider: #3)

- This is happening now—where apprentices and trainees are trained in a narrow area. A prime example is a switchboard manufacturer—their apprentices are magnificent at installing wiring looms but are very weak in their ability to work on motors. . . They would be very lucky to find a contractor who would take them on when they have completed their apprenticeship . . . The employer is resistant to rotating employees to other employers for experience because they only want people trained to wire switchboards. [Also,] it would cost more money to be training up rotated apprentices all the time. (TAFE – institute: #4)
- This is a potential problem—you have switchboard manufacturers who have employees doing nothing but wire up switchboards, whereas years ago the employee would do all the associated work too. Motors, transformers and whitegoods servicing are also areas in which employees work in a narrow field. Maybe it is a problem of the times—the average person could not cope with the complexity of the work required in all fields any longer. Sadly, the old days when a person could put his hand to just about anything is gone. (Enterprise – medium: #2)
- You do get the problem [work restricted to wiring cabinets] a little bit in the switch-boarding industry. They are usually apprenticed as fitters and don't necessarily get a licence. Lines-people in the power supply industry also don't do a whole course for a licence. (TAFE – institute: #3)
- Yes, there is a good chance this could happen. For example, we had an applicant for a position who was an electrical mechanic but who had worked largely in power transmission. He knew all about high voltage switching and working in high voltage cubicles, but this was useless to us. The only option is for narrow profile people to get add-on training in the required areas. Of course, most would still have OH&S skills and be able to work independently. (Enterprise – small: #4)
- This is a real risk. Apprentices are already being trained for a fork-lift company in a combination of electrical, hydraulics and mechanical . . . [and they] will not have enough electrical for a licence. The cynical view would be that employers would prefer the limited training because it locks the employee into their enterprise. (TAFE – institute: #5)
- A survey by one of the TAFE teachers found that [narrow workplace competency profiles and training] were likely to be less of a problem with small employers and rural employers than big ones. Larger companies may have an apprentice working on one job, such as a construction site, for 2 years. (TAFE – State authority: #3)

Why employers might prefer narrow workplace competency profiles

Three interviewees outlined reasons why employers could prefer narrow based workplace competency profiles and training:

- . . . employers ask why should they train for industry generally when they really only want training for their enterprise or section of the industry . . . and if they do restrict training it helps stop employees being poached. What they don't realise is, that: if everybody goes down that pathway, then when they need additional labour, none suitable will be around; and employees with broad training have the potential to bring new and better ways of doing things to the company. Broad training must be provided to counter this. (Union: #1)

- Why would you train someone up to be good for someone else. The onus for training not provided by the employer therefore lies with the employee and the vocational training system. The employee might need to arrange their own supplementary training. Employers can also be worried that extra training to meet competencies not required by them may have linkage to awards and so cost the employer more wages. It does seem a bit unfair to expect employers to provide training for competencies they do not need, and to pay higher wages for them. (Private training provider: #2)
- Yes this problem could exist. After all, why would an employer want to train someone in tasks that are not required of the employee or by the organisation. It is money wasted. [Our organisation] tends to train groups in special areas. For example: some electrical fitters would be trained in high voltage substation work, while others would be trained in customer installations. The competencies are significantly different because of their work environments. (Enterprise – large: #6)

Why employers and employees may prefer broad workplace competency profiles

But other interviewees felt that employers, and employees, had reason to support broad profiles and training:

- Yes—this is likely to happen. However, some large employers would like their workers *multi-skilled* for greater workforce flexibility and would move them around within the company to gain skills and experience—however, not all *employees* like this. (Enterprise – large: #3)
- Employers don't leave out things needed for a licence because the big thing employers need is licensed people . . . that is why we have gone to dual training for instrument people. The licence for instrument people is secondary but they need it to do their work. (TAFE – institute: #3)
- [Narrow workplace competency profiles and training] are possible. However, [our company] does not pose a problem in this area because it has adopted a broad range of competencies from outside [a combination from the metals industry and a large international company]. If the focus is purely internal and narrow, they may be doing themselves an injustice. (Enterprise – medium: #5)
- [Narrow workplace competency profiles and training] can certainly happen. [I have] come across examples where it has happened. [However,] whilst employees are initially happy to only have training specific to their job, they have come to realise that they will need to broaden their range of competencies for the sake of portability. (TAFE – State authority: #2)

Influence of training on breadth of workplace competency profiles

Various aspects of training were also referred to in connection with the problem of narrow workplace competency profiles and training:

- There is a move afoot for industries to have their own training. This means that an electrician at the end of four years may not necessarily get a licence—because the enterprise may not want all the training necessary for a licence to be awarded. I'm not very happy about it, but I can see it's going to happen. I would prefer to use national modules rather than give specific training, because national modules would give transferable skills. (TAFE – institute: #5)

- Yes, there will be a problem when big companies . . . decide to be very narrow in their training. From what is being said, it seems that the government may be going to give companies permission to do this. (TAFE – institute: #1)
- There will be a problem but it will not be *caused* by workplace competency profiles—it is a problem related to the abolition of declared vocations and the move away from structured curriculum to training packages. The workplace competency profiles will merely be reflecting what is occurring. (Industry training body: #5)
- The way MAATS and training packages are going, it's possible, even probable, that narrow profiles will arise. (Industry training body: #6)

Narrow workplace competency profiles may not be all bad

Whilst narrow workplace competency profiles have been generally condemned by interviewees responding to this question, they may be of some value. Probably the main criticism of narrow, enterprise-specific workplace competency profiles is that a particular employee's competencies could have limited portability. However, in this context, we are generally referring to a *collection* of competencies. It is possible that the portability of *individual* competencies held in a narrow profile could still be enhanced if the workplace competency profile helps ensure they are accurately and consistently specified and therefore more readily recognised.

Preventing or minimising the problem of narrow workplace competency profiles

Following identification and discussion of potential problems associated with narrow workplace competency profiles, interviewees were invited to suggest and comment on ways in which the problems could be prevented or minimised. Most of the responses fell into one of four categories:

- licensing
- application of frameworks or systems of regulation
- provision of training
- provision of model profiles

Licensing requirements as a counter to narrow workplace competency profiles

A number of interviewees saw licensing and the associated requirement for core competencies as at least a partial counter to the danger of narrow workplace competency profiles and training:

- You can't get seriously restricted in the trade. Licensing takes care of the problem to a large degree at the moment. (Enterprise – large: #2)
- Everyone will do the stuff that is regulated by the licensing rules—but there are certainly enterprises which do very little training. (Trainer – large employer: #2)
- Where competencies are a licensing matter there is no problem—they must be covered. But electives are a different matter—employers may only want a few. (TAFE – institute: #4)

- [Narrow workplace competency profiles and training] could be a problem—but in a licensed trade it shouldn't be too bad because people will be required to meet a minimum standard to get the licence. (Industry training body: #3)
- Licensing requirements should help overcome the problem by ensuring a broad set of essential competencies are covered . . . The licensing requirements act as a sort of safety net. (Group training scheme: #4)

Application of frameworks or systems of regulation as a counter to narrow workplace competency profiles

Interviewees who spoke of frameworks generally had two suggestions. The first was a set of rules specifying the format of workplace competency profiles so as to ensure uniformity. The second was a set of basic workplace competency profiles containing the minimum competencies which could be built on as required. The following are some of their responses:

- If an employer wants a person trained for a particular area, then there should be a set group of competencies for that area [to] ensure that all the essential competencies are covered. Then employers can choose from various pre-determined sets of competencies rather than just individual competencies. The sets could be agreed upon by the industry. (Private training provider: #3)
- A lot of this could be dealt with in the training packages that the national ITABs have got to put together. As long as the training packages are done properly, the problem will be minimised. (Industry training body: #2)
- Enterprises should be able to develop their own workplace competency profiles to suit their particular needs. But the profile should be based on a framework to ensure there is consistency in outcomes and ensure a minimum competency level is achieved—for example, for licence in electrical . . . if a licence is required or if it is going to be recognised outside the enterprise, the competencies must mapped against industry standards. (TAFE – State authority: #1)

Combining these suggestions, it would seem that there might be merit in having minimum or basic profiles to suit employers in different areas of their sector (such as data cabling), to which the employers could add further competencies, if they wish. Provided the base set of competencies was fixed (i.e. could not be removed) this would help ensure that employees have, at least, a set of core skills that can be used in other jobs.

This concept bears some similarities to that of vocational training orders in New South Wales as described below by one interviewee. In the case of vocational training orders, however, compliance is required by law:

- In NSW, the introduction of vocational training orders, enforceable by law, has ensured that [problems of narrow workplace competency profiles] do not happen. If an employer employs an electrical fitter [they] will have to ensure that the competencies outlined in the vocational training order for electrical fitter are covered.

This interviewee went on to mention several difficulties such a system could create:

- In general terms the seven core competencies are always required—so that workers can be let loose on the world at large. However, there are some enterprises that cannot always deliver training across all the competencies.

> Now, in NSW, they will have to ensure training in these areas is covered because of the vocational training orders. There will need to be a good system of records to ensure that these aims are achieved. NSW Electrical & Electronics ITC is developing a computer-based program aligned to the standards which will do this. The responsibility should be on employers to carry records. (Industry training body: #1)

In this context, another interviewee (Group training scheme: #4) described how an air conditioning company overcame the problem of being unable to train employees in all the competencies necessary for a licence. The company did this by paying for its employees to work with electrical contractors for some months to complete the required electrical competencies.

One interviewee believed there would be a need to assist employers to select competencies and develop workplace competency profiles appropriate to their needs.

❖ About 90 per cent of the State's businesses are small businesses which will not have people to interpret and apply the concept. Therefore, there is going to be a need for experienced people to work with them to sort it out. It could be statutory training authority officers [e.g. TAFE] or other independent people in the area. There is going to have to be a significant training and briefing program to enable employers to understand what is going on. (TAFE – State authority: #1)

Provision of training as a counter to narrow workplace competency profiles

A large number of interviewees suggested training as one of the keys to preventing or remedying problems associated with narrow workplace competency profiles. Many saw a broad-based training program, such as that offered by TAFE for apprenticeships, as a means of ensuring that at least the core competencies are possessed by all employees.

❖ The TAFE view is that a general set of core competencies should be taught to any trainee, even if the employer only wants a few job specific competencies, so as to equip the employee to subsequently move to other areas. Narrow bases don't help anyone. For example: the core competencies taught now contain some training in DC machines even though very few people work on DC machines these days. But even if the skills have become rusty through disuse, the employee will at least be able to recognise a DC machine and look up procedures or get advice. (TAFE – State authority: #3)

❖ To try to deal with this [narrow workplace competency profiles and training], all employees receive a generic training in addition to training specific to their area. (Trainer – large employer: #3)

❖ The union would insist that all electrical workers should have a common training in electrical principles and safety so they are not a danger to themselves and others. Training to meet licence requirements helps do this. (Union: #1)

❖ [Narrow competency profiles have] always been a problem. The greatest counter to it has been the good broad-based training they get at TAFE. Provided a person has done an apprenticeship they would automatically have been exposed to a broad range of competencies and the problem would not be serious. (Industry training body: #4)

- ANTA is currently trying to come to arrangements with the national ITABs to develop training packages in place of the present structured curriculum. Therefore narrow enterprise-based profiles are unlikely to be a problem. (Industry training body: #5)
- This sort of thing [narrow workplace competency profiles] has been happening, but NSW has a scheme [vocational training orders] to ensure that it does not. (Industry training body: #1)
- One thing we have always been pushing for is flexibility and transportability of qualifications. The [industry training] board doesn't want to see too much specialisation. (Industry training body: #3)

Some interviewees also suggested additional training in specific competencies as a means of compensating for the limitations of narrow workplace competency profiles:

- Training providers outside the company, often TAFE, generally provide exposure to the essential things which may not be experienced in the apprentice's job. (Industry training body: #2)
- While TAFE continues to offer the off-job training as it has, then the generic nature of the training will help reduce the effects of narrow profiles. But as industry and TAFE changes towards more specific training this safety net will be lessened. However, TAFE will provide one-off training to provide people with additional skills they need. (TAFE – institute: #2)
- TAFE has a role to seek ways to help people gain the competencies the employer can't provide. Even at the moment people possess licences but they don't have a full range of the competencies that could be expected of a licensed person—for example, they might have domestic wiring competencies but not industrial ones. (TAFE – institute: #1)
- TAFE and other outside training providers can provide exposure to areas likely to be neglected with a particular employer. (School project officer: #1)

The nature of credentials awarded by training providers could also act as a counter to narrow workplace competency profiles and training:

- If an employer does not want the full range of competencies needed for a certificate or qualification for example, if they do not want OH&S covered [in the training we provide], then [our organisation] will only issue a statement of attainment. (Private training provider: #2)

Group training was also seen as a means of preventing employees being trained to narrow workplace competency profiles:

- Group training companies are the most effective answer to this problem. Without it, there is always going to be a problem like this with small employers. (Trainer – large employer: #1)
- Group training schemes help prevent this happening. (TAFE – institute: #4)
- [To prevent training to narrow workplace competency profiles] . . . rotate apprentices with other employers who are able to provide the training otherwise missed, or employers can become a host employer with a group scheme. (Union: #1)

Provision of model profiles as a counter to narrow workplace competency profiles

The fourth category of suggested strategies to prevent or reduce problems associated with narrow workplace competency profiles focussed on the use of model workplace competency profiles. The feeling was that model workplace competency profiles could serve as examples of appropriate profiles for particular jobs and sections of the industry. Interviewees also suggested it would be useful to make these profiles more readily available to all people in the industry, particularly employers and employees. This could alert people to the fact that a particular workplace competency profile they were working to was narrower than that generally used or expected.

- Model workplace competency profiles could be provided to employees to inform them that they may not have all the competencies industry expects. They should also be provided to employers to help them understand that they have an obligation to train as well. (Employer association: #2)
- Employers could benefit from being given model profiles and being told that if they are going to do their own training, these are the competencies they will be expected to teach the employee. (TAFE – institute: #1)
- A typical workplace competency profile for licensed electrician could serve as a checklist for employees to help them determine what extra training they may need for a licence. (TAFE – institute: #5)
- . . . making available to employees a series of typical industry-based workplace competency profiles to make them aware of what is required outside their [perhaps narrow] job would be really valuable. (TAFE – State authority: #2)
- Issuing model workplace competency profiles to employees [to make them aware of what the industry generally expects] is a good idea. In fact in ACT we use profiles for apprentices which highlight where their training has been focussed as well as indicating where the industry thinks their training should be focussed. So if they are just working on manufacturing, apprentices can see that they are slipping behind the rest of the industry. Then they can look to us and the group training company [where applicable] to correct the problem. This system is working below level 5 to ensure that all the generic competencies are covered. (Employer association: #3)
- It could help to have sample profiles readily accessible so that employees can be informed of where they are lacking. (School project officer: #1)
- . . . one of the values of a properly drawn up workplace competency profile is that employees know upfront what they are getting themselves into. (Trainer – large employer: #1)

However, as one interviewee pointed out, if model workplace competency profiles are to be of value to employees in this context:

- . . . steps would also need to be taken to ensure that the employee has a clear understanding of what the workplace competency profile means. (Industry training body: #5)

Another interviewee felt there was a potential problem associated with the provision of model profiles to employees:

- The provision of model profiles to employees—to alert them to the fact that their training is restricted, which could lead to difficulty finding work anywhere else—could cause difficulty with the present apprenticeship system. [This would be] because some employers could not provide the breadth of training and experience required and, if the requirement was enforced, would not be able to take on apprentices. The training authority is aware of the problem but doesn't push it too far, because it is better to have a person in a job getting some training than nothing at all. TAFE has tried to fill in, in the past, but this is happening less with the new curriculum. (TAFE – institute: #3)

Summary of responses

Interviewees suggested that the incidence of narrow workplace competency profiles could rise. This is due to increasing industry specialisation and the trend of enterprises to specify training to meet their own needs and possibly conduct their own training. Most interviewees felt that narrow workplace competency profiles could present a problem for employees and the industry.

Suggestions for minimising the undesirable effects of narrow workplace competency profiles included: the need to possess a minimum set of competencies for licensing purposes; rules for minimum content of workplace competency profiles; and provision of basic workplace competency profiles to which competencies might be added but not deleted. Other suggestions included: provision of broad-based training; minimum requirements for training credentials; readily accessible additional training; and provision of model profiles to make employees and employers aware of normal industry expectations regarding competencies.

9.10 Are workplace competency profiles useful as a tool for employee selection? Are they useful for allocating tasks to employees?

One application suggested for workplace competency profiles was that they could be used in selecting people for employment. This would entail matching the competencies of the job applicants against a workplace competency profile drawn up for the position. Of course, if the applicants could also present *employee competency profiles* which specified their competencies using the same criteria, the matching process would be more simple and effective. The second application suggested was for workplace competency profiles to be used to assist in allocating work tasks to existing employees. In this case, a workplace competency profile could be drawn up listing the competencies required for a particular task and the most suitable employee selected for the task by matching employees' competencies with the workplace competency profile. Once again, employee competency profiles might enhance the process.

Questions about these two possible applications of workplace competency profiles were asked of interviewees responding to the enterprise-based questionnaire. As well as being invited to comment on these applications, interviewees were given the opportunity to rate their overall response on a scale.

Usefulness of workplace competency profiles in selection of employees

Table 9.10.1 summarises the responses relating to the usefulness of workplace competency profiles for the purpose of selecting employees. In all cases, responses focussed on the sample workplace competency profile rather than any workplace competency profile actually in use.

Table 9.10.1: Usefulness of workplace competency profiles in selection of new employees: Interviewees responding to enterprise-based questionnaire

	No use at all	A little use	Moderately useful	Very useful	Extremely useful	TOTAL
Enterprise: large			2	2	1	5
medium		1		3	3	7
small	1			2	2	5
Employer organisation		1		1		2
Group training scheme	2			2		4
Industry training body				1		1
Union					2	2
TOTAL	**3**	**2**	**2**	**11**	**8**	**26**

Workplace competency profiles as a selection tool: General comments

The following is a selection of general comments relating to the use of workplace competency profiles for employee selection:

- Workplace competency profiles would be useful as a guideline as to what an employer expects. (Enterprise – large: #2)
- I think it would be of assistance. It's really what we do [informally] now. (Enterprise – medium: #2)
- As more and more specialisation occurs in the future they [workplace competency profiles] will be the only way to go. (Enterprise – medium: #1)
- [A workplace competency profile] provides an information base for job applicants and [an employee competency profile] provides information for the employer. Ultimately if the same format was used throughout industry it would be great. It would go down the path of making a more robust industry . . . it would encourage people to fill in gaps in their competencies and the gaps in what the industry requires. We don't select apprentices as raw recruits—we prefer to select from pre-vocational course graduates. So we would only have limited use for a basic workplace competency profile, designed for entrants to the industry. (Enterprise – large: #3)
- These days, with the workplace laws as they are at the moment we certainly don't want to employ anybody who is not suitable. Once you got the criteria right, you would use a workplace competency profile to select employees. So far as providing a workplace competency profile to job applicants before interview is concerned, there is a danger that the applicants will mould their answers to suit the profile and they may present a misleading picture—so it's better that a workplace competency profile for this purpose be fairly broad. If they are specific, it's better not to issue them before the interview. (Enterprise – small: #3)

- A workplace competency profile would not be much help—you would probably look at it, then go on to other things. Most appointments are done at level 5 at which [level] reliance is mostly placed on the licensing system. They might be used for in-house selection to promote or change an employee's position. (Employer association: #3)

Need for workplace competency profile to be specific

Some highlighted the need for the workplace competency profile to be reasonably specific for it to be of value:

- Provided it is designed to suit industrial electrical rather than electrical contracting, it would be quite useful. (Enterprise – small: #2)
- Employers can add on their specific focus. This would make them [workplace competency profiles] even more useful for the purpose. (Industry training body: #4)

Limited value to small employers

Two interviewees felt that workplace competency profiles would only be of limited value to small employers:

- [Use of workplace competency profiles would] depend on the size of the company. For a larger firm this could be the way to go. For a smaller firm like ours, which tends to employ by word of mouth, or else through labour-hire, [there is] not enough time to go through a full-scale process like a big firm would. (Enterprise – medium: #4)
- Realistically, it's so hard to get employees that you tend to take almost anybody—so [a workplace competency profile] is not much use. I tend to employ people on their personality, their ability to work in remote areas and their qualifications. (Enterprise – small: #1)

Employee competency profiles

Use of employee competency profiles in the employment selection process

A number of interviewees focussed their comments on the value of employee competency profiles in the employee selection process. Reference is also made to a possible link between workplace competency profiles and employee logbooks:

- [Employee competency profiles can be] very useful—providing the competencies awarded are a true indication of a person's competency. TAFE's move to CBT has helped ensure that competencies awarded are more valid. (Enterprise – medium: #6)
- There are new national competency standards being developed together with a plan for apprentices or people in training to have a logbook in which the range of work done can be recorded and assessed at particular levels in terms of the standards. If they are implemented, a workplace competency profile based on the standards should be a very good tool against which people can be matched for employment selection purposes. However, logbooks will not be maintained by employees out of training, unless they voluntarily do so in order to climb up the ladder. (Union: #1)

- [Our group training organisation] uses a monitoring process which produces an exact profile of the apprentice's work experience against each of the core [technical] competencies of the trade [in effect, an employee competency profile]. The end product is very useful for apprentices to use in their CVs to indicate their experience and competencies. However, I can't say how employers would use it once the person was employed. (Group training scheme: #1)
- If the workplace competency profile lists the things that an employee can actually perform, then it would be useful. (Enterprise – large: #6)

Role of employees in drawing up employee competency profiles

Several interviewees referred to the role employees could play in drawing up employee competency profiles:

- Workplace competency profiles would be useful for selecting employees. [We] have used profiles in the past although we would not use one now. Instead we use behavioural description interviewing in which the focus is on how they have done things [related to the competencies] in the past. This identifies the competencies and tells a lot about how they will work in the future. The concept of an employee drawing up a profile of competencies held is an essential element of the process. You need to have a 'buy in' to the whole process to allow the employee to become, and feel involved. Employee profiles need not be developed by the employee, they can be done by management in consultation with the employee, or [as we did,] in consultation with a group acting on behalf of employees. (Enterprise – medium: #5)
- [Workplace competency profiles are] not just extremely useful, they are essential. A part of the enterprise agreements was a commitment from both parties to draw up a profile of every employee regarding their levels, their training and their competencies. These were to be used for recruitment purposes and for up-skilling. One of the biggest problems was getting the employees to agree to drawing up individual profiles for themselves—they felt it was intrusive and could be used to sack them. But when it was explained to them that it was not, and that it could benefit them as well, it was not a problem. (Enterprise – large: #5)

Value of employee competency profiles dependent on industry experience

Some interviewees pointed out that employee competency profiles are of little or no value in relation to workers new to the industry because of the workers' limited experience. Obviously, the more experience a person has, the more valuable will be an employee competency profile.

- For new employees [an employee competency profile would be no use] because the person is green— they have never done anything. For tradespeople looking to work with another employer [an employee competency profile would be] very useful. (Group training scheme: #3)
- [Employee competency profiles would be] very useful if selecting experienced tradespeople. [They would be] no use for selecting for apprenticeship because there is no prior experience to go on—they still have to learn [the competencies]. [However, some] workplace competency profile competencies like communication and other key competencies could still be relevant. (Group training scheme: #4)

Usefulness of workplace competency profiles (and employee competency profiles) in allocating work tasks to employees

Interviewees were also asked how useful they thought workplace competency profiles could be in helping allocate work tasks to the most suitable employees. Table 9.10.2 shows the pattern of their responses when asked to provide an overall scaled rating. It will be noted that in all but four of the 17 cases, interviewees were basing their answer on the sample workplace competency profile.

Table 9.10.2: Usefulness of workplace competency profiles in allocation of work tasks—based on sample workplace competency profile (upper left corner of cells) or actual workplace competency profile (lower right corner of cells): Interviewees responding to enterprise-based questionnaire

Sample WCP / Other WCP	No use at all	A little use	Moderately useful	Very useful	Extremely useful	TOTAL
Enterprise: large			1 /	/ 1	1 / 2	2 / 3
medium				1 /	2 /	3 /
small	1 /			1 /	1 /	3 /
Employer organisation			1 / 1			1 / 1
Group training scheme				2 /	1 /	3 /
Industry training body				1 /		1 /
TOTAL	1 /		2 / 1	5 / 1	5 / 2	13 / 4

Only a small number of interviewees had much to say in answering this question. Most focussed on employee competency profiles (used in conjunction with workplace competency profiles) as having a key role in the process of allocating tasks to employees.

Employee competency profiles already in use for task allocation

Three interviewees gave insights into the way employee competency profiles were already being used for allocating tasks and positions:

- ❖ [Our organisation uses] employee profiles in which employees list what they think are their skills and they also grade them from one [lowest level] to ten [highest]. Skills are taken across a number of tasks—for example: installation of MIMS cable, termination of SWA cables, and control wiring. The profiles are maintained on a data base. The generic style of the sample workplace competency profile would not be as much use—they would need to be more specific regarding types of equipment etc. (Enterprise – large: #1)
- ❖ [We] use the profiles all the time for allocating people to tasks. We have had a number of people with internal promotions because individual differences [competencies] have been picked up. We have picked up people who were 'sleepers'—who after going through TAFE have worked very well in the team environment and been made team leaders, production planners etc. It's also

giving us a second and third wave [of development] in the company. (Enterprise – large: #4)

- Recently a major employer with a number of sites has built a data base of all their employees' attributes. Where they get a contract for, say, an emergency generator system, they call the list up and choose someone competent in that area to do the job. The larger employers with, say, more than 20 employees would be looking at [employee competency] profiles for this purpose. (Employer association: #3)

Other references to employee competency profiles

- [Employee competency profiles] could be very useful—we already use the Austel licence, for example, in deciding who to put on to work involving data cabling. Similarly competence in PLC would mean we would pick them for tasks involving PLC. (Enterprise – medium: #6)
- [Employee competency profiles] could be extremely useful to managers with a lot of employees [for allocating work-tasks]. But a lot of managers [with smaller numbers of employees] can do it in their heads. Even so, [it] could be a useful reference if a manager is not sure. (Enterprise – large: #6)
- [Employee competency] profiles, once developed, could be used to allocate work tasks and jobs. They would formalise what already happens informally and make the process a lot more accurate. We have found that informal perceptions are not always accurate . . . they are subject to bias. (Enterprise – small: #3)
- [An employee competency profile] would not be any use. Supervisors know their employees and will do all that without the need for one. (Enterprise – small: #1)
- [Employee competency profiles] could be useful [for allocating work tasks] but a lot of employers don't look very favourably on this sort of thing. They think they know everything about everyone and go on gut feelings. [A workplace competency profile] would probably be a little too formal for some of them. (Group training scheme: #2)

This last interviewee went on to describe how one employer he spoke to records courses completed alongside each employee's name in the company's pay records and uses this information to allocate tasks.

The cost of not having employee competency profiles on record: An example

Finally, as an illustration of how valuable it can be to have workers' employee competency profiles on record, another interviewee cited the example of a large company which flew an employee in from another plant 600 kilometres away to perform a high voltage cable connection when, unbeknownst to the company, it already had a qualified person on site who could have done the job. (Enterprise – large: #5)

Summary of responses

Taken overall, the majority of interviewees saw workplace and employee competency profiles as either very useful or extremely useful, both for selecting employees and allocation of work tasks to employees. However, it was pointed out that smaller employers, because of their close contact with their employees, would be less likely than the larger ones to use them for this purpose.

In selection of employees, workplace competency profiles would help to clearly define enterprise expectations, assist potential employees to match themselves to the job and determine if further training was necessary. Employee competency profiles (which were seen by some as having features in common with training logbooks) were also felt to be useful tools in the selection process—provided the employee had worthwhile experience to specify.

9.11 Should key competencies be included in workplace competency profiles? If so, how should they be stated?

The Mayer key competencies were listed as items 1 to 7 in the sample workplace competency profiles (only seven items were listed because two of the eight competencies were combined into one item). The attention of all interviewees was directed to these and they were then invited to comment on how (or even if) key competencies should be incorporated into a workplace competency profile. Table 9.11.1 summarises the responses they gave. To assist interpretation, the table has been divided into two sections: one for interviewees responding from an enterprise perspective (i.e. responding to the enterprise questionnaire) and one for interviewees responding from a training provider perspective (i.e. responding to the training provider questionnaire).

The table shows those answering from an enterprise perspective (i.e. those speaking from the point of view of an employer or other field-oriented organisation). This group slightly favours listing key competencies in the profile as stand-alone competencies along the lines used in the sample workplace competency profile. Those answering from a training perspective (i.e. speaking from the point of view of a training provider or training body) did not have a marked preference, either for listing them as stand-alone competencies or incorporating them in the performance requirements.

Table 9.11. 1: Responses to the question on how key competencies should be incorporated into workplace competency profiles

Interviewee perspective (Questionnaire)	Interviewee category	List key competencies in the competency column as in sample workplace competency profile. Do not include them in performance requirements.	List key competencies in the competency column as in sample workplace competency profile *and* incorporate them into the performance requirements.	Incorporate key competencies into performance requirements. Do not list them in the competencies column.	TOTAL
Enterprise perspective	Enterprise: large	3	1		4
	medium	3	1	2	6
	small	4		1	5
	Employer organisation	2		1	3
	Group training	2	1	1	4
	Industry training body			1	1
	Union			2	2
TOTAL		**14**	**3**	**8**	**25**
Training perspective	Industry training body	2	1	2	5
	TAFE authority		1	2	3
	TAFE institute	3		3	6
	Private trg provider	1	1	1	3
	Enterprise trainer	1		1	2
	Secondary education	1			1
TOTAL		**8**	**3**	**9**	**20**

Comments in support of separately listing key competencies in workplace competency profiles

The following are some of the comments interviewees made in support of listing key competencies in the workplace competency profile:

- [Key competencies] should be specifically mentioned. It helps explain what you are reading below [i.e. the technical competencies] and raises awareness of their importance—particularly in some trades where their importance is not as apparent. (TAFE – institute: #1)
- Key competencies should be listed separately as in the sample workplace competency profile. This highlights them much more than if they were included in the performance requirements. They are important to the industry and should be listed so they stand out. (Industry training body: #5)
- [Listing the key competencies] helps draw attention to them. (Trainer – large employer: #3)

- Yes, it is worthwhile listing them. The way they are currently listed is OK. They are of equal importance to the technical competencies. (Group training scheme: #2)
- Key competencies are part of the technical competencies. But they should be specified separately as in the sample profile. (TAFE – institute: #5)
- They only need to be stated, together with a note that they underpin the other competencies plus an example of how they apply in the other competencies. (Trainer – large employer: #1)
- These are some of the most important things a tradesperson should have. They should be stated separately. (Enterprise – medium: #6)
- [Key competencies] should be listed as separate entities because they are essential parts of a person's competence and are the keys to choosing an employee. Without them the person will not be useful to the employer. (Enterprise – large: #1)
- They should definitely be listed in the profile. We want people who can work in teams, communicate, problem-solve, etc. For example [we have found that] with better communication, the productivity of the factory is increasing quite rapidly—there are fewer errors and people are now talking to each other and thinking things through —we are actually quite surprised. (Enterprise – large: #4)

Listing key competencies for the benefit of secondary schools and new entrants to the industry

Links between key competencies and secondary schooling, and their importance to young people, were also referred to by a number of interviewees:

- [It] would be useful for secondary schools to see them listed. (Private training provider: #3)
- . . . probably better to list them, particularly for young people coming into the system. If [key competencies are] dropped down into the performance requirements, they would lose a lot of their impact. (Enterprise – small: #3)
- From a secondary school perspective, they should definitely be listed. They are necessary for performance of all other competencies. Secondary school students can benefit from seeing them spelt out in a profile—it emphasises their crucial importance. As they are specified on the sample workplace competency profile is just fine. (School project officer: #1)
- [It would normally be] unnecessary to spell key competencies out in a workplace competency profile—in the industry competency standards, they are embedded in the [technical] competencies. However, they are worth highlighting to secondary schools as important components of the job. It is really up to the education system to develop the key competencies in people. It shouldn't be left to the industry to do this. They are only listed as competencies to be achieved in vocational training because schools have failed to teach them. (Industry training body: #1)

Listing key competencies separately: A risk to training

A number of interviewees, both for and against separately listing key competencies in workplace competency profiles, saw a risk that, if they were listed separately, inexperienced trainers might try to teach them in isolation as stand-alone competencies. If this was done, their relationship to the other (technical) competencies and therefore their application to the job would be lost. One interviewee (private training provider: #2) cited the case of a training organisation which treated communication as a stand-alone competency. It put employees in a classroom for 36 hours and taught communication outside the context of the job.

To help prevent this happening, one interviewee suggested adding an advisory note to the workplace competency profile:

- To prevent incompetent trainers teaching [key competencies] as separate entities there could be a note added to the workplace competency profile, warning that the key competencies are not intended to stand alone, but should be integrated into the training for other competencies. (Industry training body: #5)

Comments in support of incorporating key competencies into performance requirements

Many interviewees were in favour of incorporating key competencies into the performance requirements of the 'technical' competencies listed in the workplace competency profile. The following are some of their comments:

- [Key competencies] should not stand alone, so that once covered in training, that would be it. They should be part of everything they learn—they should be part of the set of outcomes specified for each competency. (Union: #2)
- Each one of the key competencies is an integral part of our seven core [technical] competencies. For example: using mathematical ideas [would be] part of the underpinning requirements for some core competencies. (Employer association: #3)
- [Key competencies] should be integrated into the performance requirements for the technical competencies. To list them separately is just adding another complication. (TAFE – State authority: #1)
- [Key competencies] should be integrated so as to contexturise them into the other competencies. (Industry training body: #6)
- The key competencies are in the core training that everyone gets—so they don't generally have to be spelt out in a workplace competency profile. (Industry training body: #2)
- Every curriculum these days seems to have the Mayer key competencies included as core modules . . . [this is] not the best way to view them or to teach them. (Private training provider: #2)
- TAFE has moved away from teaching key competencies as separate entities and now has them integrated into training for technical competencies. (TAFE – institute: #2)
- [Key competencies] do not need to be listed separately. The new [generic electrical and electronic cross-industry competency] standards show that they are embedded in all competencies. They are mentioned at the front [of the new standards] as well and that is probably enough—just to let people know they are there. The key competencies will be covered at different levels anyway, depending on the Australian Qualifications Framework level of technical competencies achieved. Once you set them out separately you then would need to specify levels which would then create a whole new set of

problems—assuming Australian Qualifications Framework levels were to be stated in workplace competency profiles. (Union: #1)

Once again, interviewees saw risks to training if key competencies were listed separately:

- If listed separately, people see them as separate skills when they are not—they are necessary to do everything else. It would be better to list them in the performance requirements. They stick out too much if separately listed. (Industry training body: #3)
- If they are stated [i.e. listed in the workplace competency profile] someone may be likely to try to teach them as a separate competence. (TAFE – institute: #4)
- If you highlight key competencies, there is a danger that training organisations will focus on teaching them without looking at the context in which they happen. You can't teach problem solving without having a context. So why highlight them as a generic competency of problem solving. (TAFE – State authority: #3)

An interviewee (private training provider: #2) also pointed out that in training, it is not uncommon to find that modules focussing on key competencies have the highest number of hours devoted to them. This highlights the risk of inappropriate training if workplace competency profiles list key competencies in their own right.

Another felt that incorporating key competencies in performance requirements would result in a shorter and simpler workplace competency profile (TAFE – institute: #3).

List the key competencies and *incorporate them into performance requirements*

Several interviewees saw advantages in separately listing key competencies *and* incorporating them in performance requirements.

- [Key competencies] should be listed separately in the profile, but could also be mentioned in the performance requirements for the technical competencies, to illustrate where they fit in. (Enterprise – medium: #3)
- In some industries, people know about the key competencies but do not see all of the connections. [I suggest] we also mention them in the performance requirements so as to highlight the connections. (TAFE – State authority: #2)
- Perhaps it is best to still list them separately, but also mention them in the performance requirements. [You also] need to make them clear. That is: write them down to the level of the lowest common denominator of persons likely to use them. (Enterprise – large: #3)

Selective listing of key competencies

Perhaps, rather than list all the key competencies, employers might prefer to list only those which couldn't be covered well enough in the performance requirements for the technical competencies. Or, they could list those to which special attention needs to be drawn because of the nature of the job. The following example was given by one interviewee:

- Whether to list them or not could be left to the employer, as it would depend to some extent on the job. For example, in customer service jobs, an employer may want to specifically state some of the key competencies like communicating ideas and information, whereas in a workshop-based job this may not be as important. (Enterprise - small: #5)

Some key competencies not popular

There was not unanimous acceptance of the need for all of the key competencies included in the sample workplace competency profile. The one questioned most often was *cultural understanding*. One interviewee summed the argument up rather forcefully as follows:

- Item 3 [cultural understanding] really gets up my nose. I totally disagree with it. As far as I am concerned, we are here to train electricians and people to be able to work. Cultural understanding should not be up to us. I'm afraid that if they don't know those things by the time they leave school we shouldn't be wasting time on it and employers shouldn't be having to pay for it. (Enterprise – small: #1)

Like some others who were concerned about it, he would be in agreement with inclusion of *cultural understanding* if the emphasis was on culture of the *workplace*. This would deal with such matters as understanding the way the workplace functioned and practising appropriate workplace behaviour.

However, another interviewee did see value in emphasising the need to be aware of differences in ethnic cultures:

- In cultural understanding, for example—we go in to Japanese houses—and one day one of our workers just walked in with his boots on. I had to take him outside and explain that he had to take his boots off—he just wasn't aware. (Enterprise – small: #6)

Summary of responses

Whilst there was general agreement that key competencies were an important part of competence on the job and that they should be included in workplace competency profiles, there was no clear picture as to *how* they should be included.

Listing them as individual competencies (as in the sample workplace competency profile) was seen by some as a means of drawing attention to them. Others thought listing them would introduce a risk that their relevance to other competencies would be lost and they might then be taught in isolation from the other (technical) competencies.

Some favoured incorporating key competencies into performance requirements for the technical competencies. This group thought that doing so would help highlight the fact that they were part of the technical competencies and ensure they were not taught in isolation. There was also a suggestion that it could reduce the length of the workplace competency profile, although this is questionable.

A compromise solution to the problem could be to incorporate key competencies in performance requirements for the technical competencies and to provide a list of them with explanatory information as an optional accompanying document.

9.12 Should attitudinal aspects of competency be included in workplace competency profiles? If so, how should they be stated?

Table 9.12.1: Responses to the question on how attitudinal aspects of competency should be incorporated into workplace competency profiles

Interviewee perspective (Questionnaire)	**Interviewee category**	**Include in the workplace competency profile—method not specified.**	**List attitudinal aspects in the competency column as in sample workplace competency profile. Do not include them in performance requirements.**	**List attitudinal aspects in the competency column as in sample workplace competency profile *and* incorporate them into the performance requirements.**	**Incorporate attitudinal aspects into performance requirements. Do not list them in the competencies column.**	**Do not include in the workplace competency profile at all.**	**TOTAL**
Enterprise perspective	Enterprise:						
	large	1	1		1	1	4
	medium	1	5			1	7
	small	3	1			1	5
	Employer organisation				1	1	2
	Group training		2		1	1	4
	Industry training body				1		1
	Union	1				1	2
TOTAL		**6**	**9**		**4**	**6**	**25**
Training perspective	Industry training body	4				1	5
	TAFE Authority			1	2		3
	TAFE institute	4			1		5
	Private trg provider	3				1	4
	Enterprise trainer	1				1	2
	Secondary education		1				1
	Union		1				1
TOTAL		**12**	**2**	**1**	**3**	**3**	**21**

For discussion purposes, two attitudinal aspects of competency (*work independently* and *use initiative*) were included in the sample workplace competency profile. Other possibilities such as *responsibility, commitment, punctuality* and *pleasant personality* were also mentioned in the question. Interviewees were asked to comment on whether they thought attitudes had a place in workplace competency profiles and, if so, how they should be specified.

Table 9.12.1 summarises their responses. As in the previous section, the table has been divided into two sections: one for interviewees responding from an enterprise perspective (i.e. responding to the enterprise questionnaire) and one for interviewees responding from a training provider perspective (i.e. responding to the training provider questionnaire).

As the table 9.12.1 shows, only nine interviewees (six from enterprise and three from training perspectives respectively)did not think attitudinal items should be included in workplace competency profiles at all. Of the 37 who favoured their inclusion, 19 (13 enterprise and six training) went on to suggest *how* they should be included. The majority thought they should be listed as stand-alone items in the profile (11 in favour of listing them, seven in favour of incorporating them in performance requirements and one in favour of both listing and inclusion in performance requirements).

Various reasons were given in support of including attitudinal aspects of competency in workplace competency profiles. The following are some of the general reasons given in support of their inclusion.

Some general reasons for including attitudinal aspects in workplace competency profiles

In generally supporting the inclusion of attitudinal aspects of competency in workplace competency profiles, a number of interviewees commented that they were wanted by, or useful to, employers:

- The attitudinal aspects are essential things from an employer's point of view. A good example is when one of my employees goes out to fix a power point and, when up in roof, notices the wiring is dangerous, which could be a fire hazard. They can choose to do nothing about it or they can notify the owner and arrange for the us to give a quote. This all relates to [things like] initiative, responsibility and enthusiasm. It is what we want in our employees. Enterprise – small: #4
- Attitudinal aspects do have a place in the workplace competency profile. Often as an electrician you are going to be working on your own so you are going to have to work independently and also use initiative to work independently . . . They are hard to assess, you can't rate them from 1–10, but with initiative for instance, you could make a decision based on an employee's performance. To an employer these things can be extremely important. For example you can put up with a person who is a bit slow if they turn up every day. (TAFE – institute: #5)
- [I have] mixed feelings about including them . . . they are not really competencies and therefore shouldn't be listed. But [they] are the first things that employers say they want . . . [Employers say things like] 'first find us an employee with these characteristics and then *we'll* teach them the technical skills' . . . employers would want them in the profile. (Industry training body: #6)
- Attitudinal aspects tend to be regarded as importantly as any other competency by employers. Problems are only likely to arise in the social welfare [political correctness] context. For some years people were expected to avoid reference to 'attitudes' in job interviews. This is now beginning to wane. (Industry training body: #5)

- A lot of people are promoted into positions of responsibility and management on the basis of their technical expertise rather than the appropriate skills and do not perform well—so [attitudinal aspects] are important. (Enterprise – large: #3)
- It's essential that they be mentioned because they are what employers want. (Private training provider: #1)
- It is important that employees should be aware that these things are important. Use initiative is a bit of a strange one though—sometimes it is better if workers don't use initiative. Others, like punctuality, could also be included. (Enterprise – small: #1)

One saw the devolution of decision-making in industry as a reason for including attitudinal aspects of competency in workplace competency profiles.

- [It is] reasonable to put them in the workplace competency profile. In the vehicle industry, the biggest shift, culturally, is the devolution of decisions, which involves attitudinal things. (Enterprise – large: #5)

Many interviewees supported the inclusion of attitudinal aspects of competency in workplace competency profiles if satisfactory ways of stating them and objectively measuring them could be found:

- If they can be measured objectively I would be happy to see them in the profile. (Trainer – large employer: #2)
- I would like to see them stated in the workplace competency profile . . . a good idea. They don't appear in the standards anywhere. But . . . we attempted to look at some of these some time ago as an ITAB and ran into difficulties in trying to find a way to measure them objectively—then came the problem: does this conflict with equal opportunity?—which led to the idea being thrown in the too-hard basket. If they can be worded so as not to be open to abuse. they would be helpful. (Union: #1)
- Attitudes are important. They are cropping up in other ways of describing competencies we've seen in recent times. For example: working through *work with supervision* , *work with moderate supervision* and *work independently*—as a progression towards total competency. If there is some way of clearly stating them and measuring them they should be included. (TAFE – institute: #2)
- Yes, absolutely—they should be specified. Provided they can be stated and measured objectively. (Enterprise – large: #3)

Reasons for separately listing attitudinal aspects of competency in workplace competency profiles

In the responses received, two main alternatives for incorporating attitudinal aspects of competency in workplace competency profiles emerged: listing them separately as stand-alone items or including them in the performance requirements for other competencies. The following comments were in support of listing them separately. It will be seen that the majority of interviewees saw listing as a means of raising awareness of the attitudinal aspects of competency.

- From an employer's point of view, attitudes are really important. For example, people not directly involved in the industry may not be aware of the importance of punctuality—if [a worker] is not there on time, customers are unhappy or other workers are held up in their work. In an interview, employers probably deduce a lot about attitudes from the type of work the applicant has done. Nevertheless, like key competencies, they are worth listing as an awareness raising function. (TAFE – State authority: #2)

- I don't think it hurts to list them separately as in the profile. It makes people aware of the need for them. (TAFE – institute: #3)
- These need to be specified separately to make people aware they are an important part of the job and that they will be looked for by the employer. (Enterprise - small: #5)
- They should be listed. They are important to the job and are not emphasised enough today. (Enterprise – medium: #2)
- Attitudinal competencies should be specified in workplace competency profiles—especially for the benefit of young people entering the industry. (Trainer – large employer: #3)
- From a secondary school perspective, they should definitely be mentioned in the profile. Students can see how highly valued they are in the workplace. While people should know all of the attitudes would be important, listing the important ones emphasises their importance. (School project officer: #1)
- Yes they should be listed. The way that they are stated in the sample seems OK. (Group training scheme: #2)
- You can never judge them, nevertheless there is some value in listing them so as to make people aware of their importance. (Enterprise – medium: #4)
- You can list some of them, but using them more as a word picture to describe the person . . . For example: initiative, responsibility, punctuality, reliability. I've got some doubts about putting commitment and enthusiasm into a workplace competency profile. [They are] hard to objectively measure and are open to bias. (Enterprise – large: #2)

Reasons for incorporating attitudinal aspects of competency in performance requirements

As an alternative to *listing* the attitudinal aspects of competency in workplace competency profiles, some interviewees favoured incorporating them in the performance requirements for other competencies. The following are some of their comments:

- These attitudinal aspects form part of the workplace culture, which is learned through putting the various competencies into practice. They should not therefore be listed separately. (TAFE – State authority: #1)
- I don't think they should be specified separately. They appear as part of other competencies. You look for them all the time when they [trainees] are performing other competencies. (TAFE – institute: #4)
- [The attitudinal aspects] *reliability* and *minimal supervision* should be *components* of competencies. They should not be listed separately. The others should not be in a workplace competency profile at all. (Group training scheme: #1)
- Responsibility, punctuality and ability to work reliably with minimal supervision are embedded in the other competencies and can fit in to the performance criteria rather than be specified separately. Like key competencies, they are also contextually based—a worker who is good in the

workshop may be unreliable on site—perhaps they don't like on-site work. (TAFE – State authority: #3)

- Don't list them. Our industry position is not to show them separately because they are articulated in the performance criteria of the standards. You will note that the new standards have three basic elements: the *prepare and plan* stage; the *do* stage; and the *completion* stage. The key competencies belong in all these stages. (Industry training body: #4)
- You could also mention them in the performance requirements [in addition to listing them] to highlight their relevance to particular competencies. (TAFE – State authority: #2)
- Responsibility, punctuality, ability to work reliably with minimal supervision, are embedded in the other competencies and can fit in to the performance criteria. The others are difficult to draw out . . . they are also difficult to assess and carry a risk of litigation. (TAFE – State authority: #3)

Reasons for not including attitudinal aspects of competency in workplace competency profiles

Interviewees who did not favour attitudinal aspects of competency being included in workplace competency profiles gave several reasons in support of their response. Most noteworthy were those who saw attitudes as being too difficult to measure or reliably apply and those who saw industrial or discrimination implications:

- No [attitudes should not be included in workplace competency profiles]. Attitudes change from one week to the next depending on who [employees] are working with, the type of work they are doing and outside pressures such as domestic problems. Attitudes are something that vary day by day and week by week—you can't put a rating on it. Also, attitudes are not competencies and are hard to measure. (Group training scheme: #3)
- . . . better to leave [attitudes] off a workplace competency profile. They are idealistic things—and attitude is an ever-changing variable anyway. [It is] affected continuously by things both on and off the job. (Private training provider: #3)
- [Attitudinal aspects] should not be included in a workplace competency profile. Personality, initiative and so forth are independent of whether a person is competent. It does come into the arena somewhere but not in competency standards or assessment. You could have a licensed electrician who is very competent to do the work [of a licensed electrician], but never turns up on time—but that does not mean they are incompetent. (Employer association: #3)
- It is much safer to leave [attitudes] off workplace competency profiles. There is a danger that you end up slipping across into the industrial relations area. For example, punctuality is covered under industrial relations. Competencies like *ability to work reliably* are difficult to assess—who assesses them, how objective can you be? (Industry training body: #1)
- It's not a good idea [to include them] because it could be starting to lead into areas which could be seen as discrimination, and also because they are the basic requirements for any job. Most of them should be covered in the job interview. (Enterprise – medium: #1)

- I do not think they should be listed in a workplace competency profile. There are problems [such as] who is judging who, and on what criteria are you making judgements. *If a person is performing competently, then the* attitudinal factors are either being met or are irrelevant. (Trainer – large employer: #1)
- This is a workplace political issue. It will have industrial implications if [attitudes] included in workplace competency profiles. [Inclusion of attitudes] in a workplace competency profile would be OK in a perfect world, but we do not live in a perfect world. (Union: #2)
- Attitudinal aspects should not be included because they are hard to measure—they require the use of very subtle indicators. (Enterprise – large: #4)
- Employers would want them in the profile. [However] training providers would not—because they cannot guarantee they can produce the desired attitudes as result of training. (Industry training body: #6)
- *Work independently* is relevant. But to include them just adds to the complexity. (Enterprise – small: #2)
- Attitudes are important—but they are a separate issue. They don't need to be specified in a workplace competency profile. These things are examined in the interview. (Enterprise – small: #3)
- Attitudes should not be included . . . they are not really competencies. [If you did use them,] how you measure them would be an important question. (Employer association: #2)

How should attitudinal aspects of competency be treated?

As part of the question on this topic, examples of attitudinal aspects of competency were given. They included: work independently, use initiative, responsibility, commitment, pleasant personality, punctuality, and ability to work reliably with minimal supervision. The term attitudinal aspects of competency was deliberately used because, strictly speaking, not all the examples could be properly defined as competencies. In their responses, some interviewees commented on this and offered ideas on how attitudinal aspects of competency should best be categorised and applied in relation to workplace competency profiles. A number favoured the concept of *work ethics*:

- Although they belong in a workplace competency profile, the attitudinal aspects are not really competencies. (Private training provider: #1)
- These get back to the concept of work ethics. (Industry training body: #1)
- [Attitudinal aspects] do not need to be separately specified in a workplace competency profile. I think they are part of what is known as *work ethics*. If you don't have work ethics and turn up for work on time, then you are not much use to the employer. Work ethics are an integral part of any job; they should not be treated as a separate thing. (Industry training body: #2)
- The attitudinal aspects all come down to a single category of *work ethics*. [You can] specify the competency as work ethics and then break it down on the right hand side as [things like] initiative, responsibility and enthusiasm. This enables them to be looked at in a holistic way, or perhaps each can be given a score which is then combined to determine competence in work ethics. (Then

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if a person is inhibited, they can still be declared competent in work ethics if they score highly in the other aspects.) (Group training scheme: #4)

Others were concerned with the problems of defining and measuring attitudinal aspects of competency. Some felt it was more practical and objective to operate from a behavioural perspective. The need for trained assessors was also raised:

- [Our company] has approached [the matter of including attitudes] by referring to attitudes as behavioural stuff. Behaviour is how you apply your knowledge and skills. It can be a technical or customer focus type thing. If you delete the attitudinal or behavioural aspect you lose one part of what forms your measure of competency. So it is very important to have behavioural factors in there as a measure. A lot of people don't like to use it because it causes conflict—but to delete it takes a lot of the meaning out of the competencies. (Enterprise – medium: #5)
- I have trouble with the word *attitude*. I would prefer to think in terms of demonstrated behaviours, which can be more easily defined, such as punctuality. [Assessment of them] should be objective rather than subjective. (Trainer – large employer: #2)
- Attitudinal aspects are dangerous if they are subjectively specified and measured. If they are to be used, they need to be reduced to measurable concepts. For example: punctuality needs to be measured in terms of the number of times late. (Private training provider: #2)
- . . . but from a training point of view—how do you teach and assess some of them [attitudinal aspects]? (TAFE – institute: #3)
- Attitudes [like independence and initiative] should be incorporated as part of a grading system rather than stated as separate competencies. So they could appear in the performance requirements on the right-hand side for the competencies in which they were relevant. For example: if they could perform the competency under supervision, that would be a pass; under minimal supervision becomes a credit; if they can do it by themselves, that becomes distinction level. (Private training provider: #2)
- Certainly, things like initiative, willingness to accept responsibility, commitment, punctuality and enthusiasm should be clearly demonstrated without question. But the assessor needs to be trained to assess these things. (Enterprise – large: #3)
- If you need to put [attitudinal aspects] in, they should be very specifically defined and should be accompanied by examples of what is required. If you can't do that, they shouldn't be in the workplace competency profile. Many are on every employer's list, but just simply listing them can leave them too subjective in assessment. People would need to be trained a lot more in assessment than they are now to be able to successfully assess them. Attitudinal aspects have a place in the profile but it will be some time before this can be successfully done. They need to be introduced slowly and carefully. Some, like *work independently*, are easier than others. (Industry training body: #3)

Some miscellaneous comments

The following is a collection of comments which did not fall neatly into the above categories but which provided interesting insights.

One interviewee suggested:

- . . . perhaps they [attitudinal aspects of competency] ought to be combined with the key competencies. (Industry training body: #2)

Another indirectly highlighted the difference of opinions which can exist in relation to attitudinal aspects of competency:

- The main beef in our enterprise bargaining is what is expected of an A-class electrician. Do they just turn up and be told what to do, or do they use a bit of nous. (Enterprise - small: #5)

In one brief comment, an interviewee summed up the importance his company attached to attitudinal aspects of competency:

- [Our] company doesn't employ people, it employs attitudes. (Enterprise – large: #4)

One observed that, even within the one industry, the nature of a person's work can have a bearing on the importance of particular attitudinal aspects of competency. For example, one position may require a person to be meticulous and able to cope with a high degree of responsibility, another might require good communication and other people-oriented skills to generate goodwill and further business:

- Some of these attitudinal aspects are extremely important, particularly now ETSA is not doing inspections and we are having to do our own inspecting and self-certify our work. Employees have to be able to test and take responsibility. Also, service mechanics have to be able to work independently and be well liked in their dealings with clients. You could almost have two different profiles: one for *electrical mechanic - construction* and one for *electrical service mechanic*. (Enterprise – medium: #6)

And lastly, a reassuring comment from one who has been through the process of incorporating attitudinal aspects in workplace competency profiles:

- It is an essential part of the whole. [The company] initially had some reservations about including [attitudinal aspects]—because they would not be used objectively. There is no employee opposition to it now. Whereas initially, employees were nervous about it, [saying things like] *I'll be picked on attitude* or *they don't like the colour of my hair*, it hasn't worked out that way. In a peer situation particularly, the peer judges know who is or isn't pulling their weight. [The company] initially referred to *attitude* but it was subsequently changed to *application* —it really means the same thing. Now I do not believe there is a problem. (Enterprise – large: #5)

Which attitudinal aspects of competency should be mentioned?

Interviewees who were in favour of including attitudinal aspects of competency in workplace competency profiles were invited to comment on what they felt should be mentioned.

- Certainly, things like initiative, willingness to accept responsibility, commitment, punctuality and enthusiasm should be clearly demonstrated without question. (Enterprise – large: #3)
- Motivation, honesty, preparedness to work, are the three things employers want more than anything else. (Private training provider: #1)

- . . . a few more should be added, including punctuality (important in the industry because other workers on building sites can be held up) also, enthusiasm and pleasant personality. (Group training scheme: #2)
- Respect for others, yourself and property, and pride of work are two important ones not mentioned. (School project officer: #1)
- Initiative, punctuality and ability to work reliably are some of the more important ones. (Union: #1)
- Others could be included too—including loyalty. (Enterprise – medium: #2)

How to incorporate attitudinal aspects of competency into workplace competency profiles

Before leaving this topic, interviewees were invited to suggest ideas on how attitudinal aspects of competency might best be included in workplace competency profiles or otherwise dealt with. Several thought some could be combined with the key competencies:

- They could really be included with the key competencies and incorporated into some of them. (Employer association: #1)
- Combine [attitudinal aspects] and the key competencies into just a few items. (Enterprise – small: #2)
- Perhaps they ought to be combined with the key competencies. (Industry training body: #2)
- Possibly some of them could be combined. For example: reliability could really encompass responsibility, commitment, enthusiasm, punctuality, determination. (TAFE – institute: #2)
- The ones [attitudes] which cannot be listed because they are difficult to specify objectively are probably best covered in a face-to-face interview rather than be viewed as a competency. (Trainer – large employer: #2)

Summary of responses

A large majority of interviewees felt that attitudinal aspects of competency were important enough to the workplace to warrant their inclusion in workplace competency profiles. This was despite the fact that most were not strictly definable as competencies. Several interviewees suggested they could be put in a single category called *work ethics*.

Noteworthy reasons for including attitudinal aspects in workplace competency profiles were the need to raise awareness of their importance (particularly to employers) and their increasing importance to the workplace brought about by devolution of decision making in industry to lower levels.

Those who did not favour their inclusion in workplace competency profiles were most often concerned about the difficulty of specifying and measuring attitudes, and the associated industrial and discrimination implications if this could not be done satisfactorily.

9.13 Should relative importance of competencies be shown in workplace competency profiles?

This question was included to test the idea that it could be helpful to people using workplace competency profiles if enterprises or other organisations drawing them up were to indicate which competencies were more important. Interviewees were asked whether they believed some competencies were more important than others and, if so, whether, and how, the relative levels of importance should be indicated in workplace competency profiles. The two most commonly suggested ways in which relative importance could be shown were either to group or list them in the profile, or to specify their importance in a separate explanatory sheet.

Their responses are summarised in Table 9.13.1. Responses on the issue of how relative importance should be shown are not included because insufficient responses were received.

As the table shows, a large majority of interviewees in both categories (enterprise and training) felt that some competencies were more important than others. However, interviewees were fairly evenly divided (in both categories) on whether or not the relative importance should be shown. The comments indicate that those who were against this generally felt that the relative importance specified in a particular workplace competency profile would vary from one situation or work task to another.

Table 9.13.1: Whether (and how) relative importance of competencies should be specified in workplace competency profiles

Interviewee perspective (Questionnaire)	Interviewee category	Are some competencies more important than others?		Show relative importance.	Do not show relative importance.	*TOTAL
		Yes	No			
Enterprise perspective	Enterprise: large	4	1	2	1	3
	medium	6		3	2	5
	small	5		2	2	4
	Employer organisation	1	1	1	2	3
	Group training	4		1	2	3
	Industry training body	1		1		1
	Union	2		1		1
TOTAL		**23**	**2**	**11**	**9**	**20**
Training perspective	Industry training body	4	1	1	2	3
	TAFE authority	3		4		4
	TAFE institute	4	1	3	1	4
	Private trg provider	2	1		1	1
	Enterprise trainer	1			2	2
	Secondary education	1			1	1
	Union	1				
TOTAL		**15**	**4**	**8**	**7**	**15**

*Note: Totals in the right-hand column only apply to the preceding two columns on the left.

The following is a cross-section of comments received on this issue.

Why relative importance should be shown in workplace competency profiles

Interviewees gave a variety of reasons for showing relative importance of competencies in workplace competency profiles.

- There is some sense in listing some as more important than others. In many cases a new employee will not initially have all the competencies needed in a particular job. It would be helpful for the workplace competency profile to indicate which ones the employee should at least come in to the job with. The others can subsequently be picked up through experience and training. (Enterprise - small: #5)
- Showing relative importance in a workplace competency profile is useful to a trainer, so they can provide 'Rolls Royce' training in the competencies rated as important. This could lead to a distinction level of competence if grades were used. (Private training provider: #2)

- Some attention should be drawn to the important competencies such as the basic technical skills. For example [our company] attaches great importance to some aspects of OH&S. The profile could draw attention to the important ones. (Trainer – large employer: #3)
- [It is] OK to specify some as more important. In the way the competency standards are drawn up there will be a core of things that an employee must be able to do, then there will be a bank of electives which are left to the employer or employee to decide what you should have. For example, while scaffolding is not important to most employers, it is there for an employer to select if it is relevant. So within a profile an employer could specify some competencies as less important than others. (Industry training body: #4)
- [Showing relative importance] could separate out the hard, technological skills from the soft skills. The hard skills would be seen as essential and the soft as desirable. Competencies should be labelled so as to put emphasis from the training perspective on which were the bread and butter ones. (Enterprise – medium: #3)
- [Our company] uses *essential* competencies which are critical and *desirable* competencies which they can get by without. (Enterprise – large: #4)

How to indicate importance

Interviewees who supported the idea of showing relative importance of competencies in workplace competency profiles were asked to suggest how this should be achieved. Most favoured either grouping the competencies or indicating relative importance on a separate sheet. The following are samples of what they said:

- It would be a good idea to list or group them in order of importance. Metals [industry] has, in a way, defined different levels of importance by breaking competencies into groups, like foundation competencies and core competencies. So if you want to enter the industry, the foundation competencies are the first things you require—they are the most important ones you need. Although they haven't specifically said so, it seems that this is the way they intend them to be interpreted. (Enterprise – medium: #5)
- From a provider point of view it would help to have the more important competencies identified as an aid in where to put special emphasis in the training —to help the trainer tailor the training to meet enterprise needs. [You could] provide a separate explanatory sheet to identify important competencies. (TAFE – State authority: #2)
- A better way of highlighting importance could be [by means of] an accompanying [explanatory] sheet rather than specify it on the profile. (Enterprise – large: #1)
- The order in which they are currently listed seems OK—they are good general ones to start with. Otherwise there is not much need to alter the order. The importance will vary from one employer or job to another. (Group training scheme: #2)
- You can't say some are more important than others. But I like the idea of grouping the competencies, like the sample, so that the first competencies listed give a word picture of the person and the ones after that give a word picture of their working capabilities. (Enterprise – large: #2)

If relative importance should be shown, which are the important ones?

Interviewees who favoured showing relative importance of competencies were also asked to suggest which competencies they felt were the important ones. Seven out of the ten who responded to the question chose to nominate competencies from those listed in the sample workplace competency profile. Table 9.13.2 summarises their responses:

Table 9.13.2: Important competencies: Identified by interviewees from those listed in the sample workplace competency profile

	Interviewee number	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	
	Competency								**TOTAL**
1	Communicate clearly and effectively in the workplace.		1				1	1	3
2	Perform workplace calculations.		1		1			1	3
3	Cultural understanding.							1	1
4	Work with others as part of a team.		1					1	2
5	Plan and organise routine work.			1			1	1	3
6	Collect, organise and analyse information.		1		1			1	3
7	Awareness of, and ability to use, up-to-date technology.	1	1	1	1		1	1	6
8	Work independently.		1			1			2
9	Use initiative.		1						1
10	Occupational health and safety.	1	1						2
11	Diagnose faults in apparatus and associated basic circuits.		1			1			2
12	Repair faults in apparatus and associated basic circuits.		1			1	1		3
13	Transport and handle electrical materials.								
14	Assemble, work from, and dismantle scaffolding.								
15	Install wiring enclosures, cable support systems, cables and accessories.	1	1						2
16	Install and connect fixed wired electrical apparatus.	1	1						2
17	Test apparatus and associated basic circuits.	1	1		1			1	4
18	Undertake commissioning procedures.	1	1				1	1	4
19	Maintain apparatus and associated basic circuits.		1						1

Comments of interest were:

- ❖ Occupational health and safety is a definite must because of duty of care implications. (TAFE – institute: #5)
- ❖ Some skills are critical to proper and safe performance of a job. [They are] critical for OH&S and environmental protection reasons and for financial reasons (such as working on a $500 000 plant). The critical competencies are: test apparatus and associated basic circuits—to ensure the electrical

environment is safe; perform workplace calculations—so they do not undersize cables; and awareness of, and ability to use, up-to-date technology. (TAFE – State authority: #3)

- The important competencies that industry generally expects people to have are the seven core competencies from the old electrical standards. They are: install electrical equipment, install electrical wiring systems, test and connect electrical installations, diagnose and repair faults in electrical equipment, respond to breakdown in electrical equipment, maintain electrical equipment, and decommission electrical equipment. They are in the competencies listed in the sample workplace competency profile, but are not described in the same way. (Union: #1)
- Relative importance hinges on the nature of the work being performed. In installation work, the critical ones would be competencies dealing with safety, regulations, and related technical competencies. In maintenance work, the critical ones would be competencies dealing with safety, maintenance, [diagnostic] fault finding, and repair. (TAFE – State authority: #1)
- Yes, there are relative degrees of importance. They depend on the work done. With a service mechanic you would definitely want number 8: work independently; number 11: diagnose faults in apparatus and associated basic circuits; and number 12: repair faults in apparatus and associated basic circuits; whereas you wouldn't need them with a construction electrician. For number 18: undertake commissioning procedures, most electricians wouldn't know where to start. (Enterprise – medium: #6)
- Key competencies are very important. Others which are also important are, number 17: test apparatus and associated basic circuits; number 18: undertake commissioning procedures—which are very important because electrical employees are paid a testing allowance in Queensland; number 7: maintaining technology; and number 10: occupational health and safety. (Enterprise – large: #1)
- The most important ones are those related to licensing or regulation. Employers would put attitudinal ones higher than technical competencies. (Industry training body: #6)

Reasons for not showing relative importance of competencies in workplace competency profiles

The following is a selection of comments and reasons given by interviewees who were against including relative importance of competencies in workplace competency profiles. Many argued they should not be shown because they would vary from one position or one work task to another. However, in the case of *positions*, at least, this argument appears to focus on generic workplace competency profiles. If workplace competency profiles were drawn up for individual positions, specification of relative importance of competencies might contribute to a more accurate description of a position.

The first group of responses came from interviewees answering from an enterprise perspective:

- No [do not show relative importance] . . . because importance can vary from one employer to another and one task to the next. Also, at the present time, employees tend to be fairly mobile in the electrical industry . . . changing employers. Broad spectrum profiles can be helpful to employees who want to move around. (Group training scheme: #3)

- No, all should be rated as equally important. If variations do occur, they vary from job to job anyway. For example, OH&S could be extremely important to someone doing high voltage switching but would be of much less importance to a person who works in front of a computer. Metal industry standards tend to give weighting to various competencies but I don't agree with it. (Enterprise – large: #5)
- You wouldn't want to give one [competency] a higher profile than another because the importance would vary from one job of work to another, however, OH&S would always be an important one. (Enterprise – large: #3)
- All are important. They will vary from one employer and job to the next. [It is] better not to try to single them out. (Enterprise – medium: #2)
- . . . don't show relative importance . . . because in a different workplace or on a different job the relative importance would vary. (Enterprise – small: #2)
- Although some are more important than others, with variations depending on the nature of the enterprise and particular job being done, relative importance shouldn't be shown. (Enterprise – medium: #4)

This second group of responses came from interviewees answering from a training perspective, their responses focussing on the needs of the people being trained and those of trainers:

- From an apprentice training perspective, all should have the same weighting. For employers to specify some as more important than others is fine for their short-term business needs but will limit the portability a person has after training. (Group training scheme: #1)
- I don't think competencies should be given levels of importance in a workplace competency profile. For electrical mechanics, all the competencies listed [in the sample workplace competency profile] are relevant. While as a result of experience in a job, [electrical mechanics] will be stronger in some than others, they should have a grounding in all of the ones relevant to a typical electrical mechanic. (Private training provider: #3)
- It would be beneficial to indicate relative importance in some situations but their importance would change from one situation to another and according to the nature of the particular enterprise. If we went down this path the workplace competency profile scene would become too complex because we would need to have so many profiles, all closely related, dealing with different situations. (Industry training body: #5)
- From my perspective, all are important. [There is] no need to identify some as more important than others. (School project officer: #1)
- . . . how do you assess the importance of one against another? (Industry training body: #6)

Summary of responses

Most interviewees agreed with the proposition that some competencies could be more important than others. However, they were fairly evenly divided on whether or not relative importance should be shown in a workplace competency profile.

A common reason given in support of showing relative importance was that they could tell an employee which competencies an enterprise or occupation placed highest priority on. Therefore, the employee would know which competencies were most needed on entry to a job, or which needed to be acquired most urgently if training was necessary. Inclusion of relative importance could also help trainers determine where to place emphasis in provision of training.

Those against showing relative importance in workplace competency profiles most often reasoned that it was too variable to be consistently specified, often changing from one work task to another. Others felt it could constrict training, thus preventing individuals from obtaining a sufficiently broad set of competencies.

If relative importance was to be shown, some suggested it might be done either by listing the competencies in order of importance or by allocating them to several groups which could be ranked in importance.

9.14 Should grades of competencies be shown in workplace competency profiles?

The purpose of this question was to determine whether grades of competencies should be specifiable in workplace competency profiles. There could be several reasons for including grades of competencies in workplace profiles depending on the application of the profile. For example: an enterprise may want grades included so as to indicate to a prospective employee the level of expertise being sought in particular competencies. An employee, on the other hand, may want grades shown in an employee competency profile so as to indicate their level of proficiency to a prospective employer. The enterprise, too, may like to see grades in employee competency profiles to enable it to judge more reliably job applicants on the grounds of ability. In their responses, most interviewees spoke generally and did not distinguish between applications in the manner just described.

Table 9.14.1 is a summary of interviewees responses.

Inspection of the tabled results shows some interesting outcomes.

There is some anecdotal evidence regarding enterprise dissatisfaction with the abolition of letter grades in training (e.g. D, C, P_1, P_2 and F for distinction, credit, high pass, low pass and fail respectively). Based on this, it was expected that enterprises would favour inclusion of competency grades in workplace competency profiles. In fact, there was a fairly even balance across large, medium and small enterprises (seven in favour of inclusion, seven against, taken across all enterprises).

It was also expected that training providers would prefer competency grades not to be shown in workplace competency profiles. Surprisingly, opinion slightly favoured the inclusion of grades (11 respondents in favour, nine against). Further analysis shows that most of the opposition to their inclusion comes from those involved in the design and formal administration of training (industry training bodies and TAFE authorities). Those directly involved in the delivery of training (TAFE institutes, private providers and enterprise trainers) were strongly in favour of grades being included (nine in favour, two against).

Table 9.14.1: Responses to the question of whether grades should be specified for competencies in workplace competency profiles.

Interviewee perspective (Questionnaire)	Interviewee category	Yes: grades of competencies should be shown in workplace competency profiles	No: grades of competencies should not be shown in workplace competency profiles	TOTAL
Enterprise perspective	Enterprise: large	2	2	4
	medium	2	3	5
	small	3	2	5
	Employer organisation		3	3
	Group training	2	2	4
	Industry training body		1	1
	Union	2		2
TOTAL		**11**	**13**	**24**
Training perspective	Industry training body	1	4	5
	TAFE authority		3	3
	TAFE institute	4	1	5
	Private trg provider	4		4
	Enterprise trainer	1	1	2
	Secondary education	1		1
TOTAL		**11**	**9**	**20**

Because of the surprising patterns of results for this question, comments from interviewees who were the source of the unexpected outcomes have been grouped by interviewee category. For each group, the comments of those in favour of including grades are listed ahead of those against.

Overview of issues raised in comments on inclusion of grades in workplace competency profiles

As the comments will show, grading of competencies is a vexed question. About half the interviewees responding to the question believed there could be merit in grading competencies, but many saw difficulties which would need to be overcome before a workable system could be achieved. Because such a large number of ideas were expressed in the comments, an attempt has been made here to give a broad overview of the main issues raised.

Methods of determining and specifying grades

Many interviewees commented on the difficulties involved in determining grades in a way which was efficient and produced useful and reliable distinctions. What should determinations be based on? Four suggestions were:

- the number of elements of a competency satisfied (this would necessitate additional, optional elements being added to extend the competency for higher grades)
- an employee's ability to simultaneously apply multiple competencies to a task
- the degree of supervision of the employee needed in order for the employee to satisfactorily apply the competency
- the time a person [in training] takes to become competent

Another suggested that competency grades could be specified by careful definition of the performance requirements for the competency, which could include the range statement.

Several pointed out that grading off-the-job components of a competency was a lot easier than on-the-job ones. But it would be quite inadequate to base the grading of a person's competence only on the off-the-job components.

One suggestion, not mentioned in the comments above, was for employers to specify grades of competence for a workplace competency profile on a separate explanatory sheet. This would allow the employer to explain in detail the grade required and the reasons for requiring it without making the profile an overly complex document.

Consistency in grading

Many interviewees expressed concern regarding consistency of grades. Even before this, there would be a need to agree on the number of grades and a common nomenclature to be used. Several interviewees felt it would be best to keep the system as simple as possible. If it became too complex or had too many grades it would be impractical. Some suggested having just three classifications: *not yet competent*, *competent* and *highly competent*. Whatever system was used, the meaning of the grades and how they were to be determined and applied would need to be clearly explained to all concerned.

One interviewee made the important observation that if the system results in grading of poor quality, it will bring *all* grading into disrepute, so if grading is introduced it needs to be done properly. To ensure consistency, it was suggested that only qualified assessors should determine grades. Suitably qualified trainers would be one obvious choice. As discussed in the previous paragraph, there would need to be a properly designed and well-explained system, otherwise it would be expecting too much of the assessors.

Legal implications?

One hypothetical question, although not mentioned in the published comments, was raised in general discussion of this topic. It was the possibility that employers might face litigation in the event of an accident if they chose an employee with a level of competency which was not adequate for a particular job. For example: asking an employee who was graded as merely competent to perform a task judged to need a high level of competence. This is an issue which should not be overlooked if grading of competencies is introduced.

Some suggested applications for competency grades in workplace competency profiles

Several interviewees commented on the importance of a suitable grading system for competencies in workplace competency profiles. they saw it as a step towards arresting the trend towards mediocrity which they felt accompanied the introduction of the simple distinction between competent and not yet competent.

Grades were also seen as a useful tool for identifying the higher-level (higher quality?) employees suitable for roles requiring higher levels of ability or greater responsibility (trouble-shooters, supervisors, etc.). Along the same lines, it was also suggested that grades of competencies might help reliably discriminate between employees for the purpose of promotion and determination of pay rates.

Comments from respondents associated with enterprises

The following are comments from interviewees responding to the enterprise questionnaire.

Enterprise – large

- In areas where we need it, like soldering, we set very high standards to be met—they either reach it or they don't. In Melbourne we have two separate [grades of] competency in soldering: competent in *high reliability* soldering, and competent in *fine pitch* soldering, which is at a far higher level. Employees can progress from high reliability to fine pitch soldering. The difficulty [in any grading scheme] is in getting the distinctions between, say, competent and highly competent. (Enterprise – large: #4)
- It could be useful to be able to specify levels in workplace competency profiles. But this does mean that you need additional [elements] in the competency to enable people to be assessed as being at a higher level. When grading in training went to competency achieved/not achieved, it was almost useless to us from a functional basis, where we wanted to look at upward progression of employees in the organisation. (Enterprise – large: #6)
- Not sure whether grades should be specified. It could be useful, but could lead to some companies being over prescriptive and hinder selection of suitable employees. (Enterprise – large: #1)
- . . . you don't need to put grades into the profile. (Enterprise – large: #2)
- Grade levels could refer to the grade of tradesperson, that is, grade 5 equals a base tradesperson and grades 6 and 7 the higher levels. It's best to stick to competent/not competent. Otherwise you could be asking too much of assessors to make and interpret judgements. (Enterprise – large: #3)

Enterprise – medium

- Unions generally don't like to see people measured. Nevertheless, both [work colleague] and I feel that it would be an excellent idea. Employers would like to be able to say we want some one who is extremely good at performing a particular competence. The profile could then be used to identify a skills gap with the result that the company would need to give someone additional training or employ someone with the required level of competence. (Enterprise – medium: #5)

- Yes, it could be a good idea—but how would you do it? Everybody could have different ideas on what the grades meant. Maybe it could be done if you give people set things to do and see if they do them quickly and accurately. The reality is that it would probably be too difficult. (Enterprise – medium: #6)
- I don't feel grades of competence should be specified on a profile, it's too hard to say how the competencies should be graded. However, there is an argument for competencies to be graded, even though it is getting away from the existing concept of competence. (Enterprise – medium: #3)
- No, grades should not be specified. Either you can do it or you can't. It wouldn't achieve much. [Grading] might also lead to a multitude of classification levels. (Enterprise – medium: #1)

Enterprise – small

- Yes, it would be useful to be able to specify levels of competency in workplace competency profiles. The reason is that there are different levels of employee—the basic one who just does the job, and the above-average one who will be a supervisor. So a workplace competency profile for a supervisor would specify high levels of competency in, say, the personal skills. (Enterprise – small: #4)
- Yes, grades could be used, particularly in employee profiles. (Enterprise – small: #3)
- Three levels would be all that was needed: not competent, competent, and competent with merit—or whatever names you want to give them. (Enterprise – small: #2)
- No, grading would only add a complication which is largely unnecessary. There would also be problems in assessing what grade an applicant actually was, and in maintaining consistency of grading. (Enterprise – small: #5)

Other enterprise questionnaire interviewees

- Although it would be difficult, it is worth trying to do. It would probably be best to reduce it to three [grades]: non-competent, competent, and highly competent. Employers want grades from TAFE because they are looking for something to reward their employees on. The problems would be how to assess and who is to do the assessment. (Group training scheme: #2)
- Yes, there is some merit in being able to specify grades of competence. Also, new standards will more clearly identify an electrical worker's AQF level, that is, they will enable identification of whether the worker is qualified to work on basic or complex circuits, for example. If the workplace competency profiles are based on the standards, they could specify the range and level of competencies and so be used for determination of the rate of pay for a job . . . The range and level of supervision would also be a factor. (Union: #1)
- Without some form of grading, it would be possible to have two employees with the same set of competencies, and one, who had done post-trade training, would not stand out from another who had not. (Union: #2)

- There is some value in having grading in the off-the-job components. But in the workplace you can either do the work or you can't . . . there is no real sense in having grading in that area. (Industry training body: #4)
- Within a workplace there is some merit in grading competencies in workplace competency profiles . . . where the grades reflect what the employer needs. But, across workplaces, there is the danger that the grades used may be inconsistent, which could disadvantage some employees. (Group training scheme: #4)
- [No,] don't include grades. You are either competent or you are not. [However,] if grading is to be used, one method of grading is to base it on the time a person [in training] takes to become competent. (Enterprise – large: #5)
- No, grades should not be shown. We have a big enough problem getting our heads around competency assessment and competency profiles without putting additional variables in there. Either they can or cannot do it. (Employer association: #3)
- Grades should not be shown . . . On-the-job components of competency should not be graded . . . Other than in off-the-job training, grading undermines the whole concept of competency-based training. (Group training scheme: #1)
- No, you should not specify grades, because you will be trying to do something that should be done elsewhere [in training institutions]. If you have an employee doing, say, competencies number 11 [*diagnose faults in apparatus and associated basic circuits*], number 12 [*repair faults in apparatus and associated basic circuits*], number 17 [*test apparatus and associated basic circuits*], and maybe number 18 [*undertake commissioning procedures*], they will probably be a higher-level employee anyway. (Employer association: #1)
- Levels should not be specified. You are either competent or you are not. (Group training scheme: #3)

Comments from respondents associated with training

The following are comments from interviewees responding to the training questionnaire.

Industry training body

- There would be advantages in allowing employers to specify levels of competency in workplace competency profiles. Specifying grades would help reduce the tendency to head towards mediocrity. [It would] encourage employees or potential employees to go further along a career path and pursue further training. (Industry training body: #5)
- You are either competent or not competent. Specifying levels of competence could be dangerous. If you are putting grades in a profile you will need to define what the grades mean and be able to quantify them which would be very hard to do. If it could be done, it might help with classifying employees levels. (Industry training body: #3)
- Grading can be done—it is possible. But from a training point of view, and spirit of competencies, they shouldn't be graded. Industry [employers] would want it, however. . . competence is not the same as mastery, in which grades are more appropriate. (Industry training body: #6)

- You should stay with competent/not competent. Grading, even of technical competencies, introduces dangers of subjectivity. (Industry training body: #1)
- Competencies should not be graded—you are either competent or you are not. If someone is judged to be moderately competent and there is an accident, then the employer could be in trouble. (Industry training body: #2)

TAFE authority

- Grades should not be used in workplace competency profiles . . . Competency grades will have different meanings for different organisations. We are having enough trouble getting agreement on interpretation of AQF levels within one industry. For example, one State says 15 modules above trade, plus supporting competencies, is a Certificate 4—another says it represents a diploma. Also, if a bad judgement of level is made and a person turns out to be a dud, then this throws the whole system of grades into disrepute. It is better to minimise the risk by having a minimum number of grades [competent or not competent] . . . I don't think grading is necessary other than in off-the-job performance . . . (in which grading is possible and can be useful for AQF purposes). The workplace has its own system of grading in which better people get promotion and higher pay. (TAFE – State authority: #3)
- You should only grade as competent or not competent. Grades are only wanted because people want to be able to award prizes—not because they want people to be able to perform. (TAFE – State authority: #1)
- I'm not in favour of grading competency. From a provider's point of view it is probably sufficient [for the provider] to be aware that a particular competency is important—then if an employee is found not to be competent in it, extra work will need to be put in to it with some urgency to make sure a *high* level of competency is achieved. Whereas, with a low importance competency, the matter is not so urgent and a *just satisfactory* level of competency is sufficient. (TAFE – State authority: #2)

TAFE institute

- Yes [there should be grades specified for competencies]. The present system allows for mediocrity in complex tasks—for example, those which might have a lot of technology, problem solving and maths involved. Some employers want to know—is a person really good or just average? If there was a grading scheme, it could then be used in specifying competencies in the workplace competency profile. (TAFE – institute: #1)
- From a training provider's view, grading of competencies is useful. Employers and even some students prefer to be graded. It could be useful to specify grades in worker profiles for the benefit of employers. (TAFE – institute: #4)
- TAFE [in this State] no longer uses competent/not yet competent. We are now back to pass, credit, distinction. This has been far better received by employers. Employers did not understand what *CA* meant—nor did a lot of our lecturers. There should be provision to indicate grading. However, employers may not grade competencies in the same way training providers would. For example, they may say a person has to be able to perform a certain task within a specified time with no more than two minor faults. (TAFE – institute: #5)
- Certainly there are workers I have come across who, while meeting the electrical standards, are sloppy in their work—they obviously take no pride in

their work. Take typing: you may be able to type at 50 words per minute which is the minimum required, but the *desirable* level might be 120 words per minute. So there is some value in being able to specify grades of competence in a workplace competency profile—but not in all cases . . . In our institute, higher grading is not awarded on level of knowledge so much as extended ability to apply it, or the ability to draw together and use multiple competencies in a job. (TAFE – institute: #2)

- Industry wants grading of off-the-job training. But it may be better to think in terms of more competencies than more competent—that is, the more competent person is judged *more competent* because they have achieved more competencies. Grading of competencies could also lead to lack of uniformity across Australia which is undesirable—we are trying to get away from that. (TAFE – institute: #3)

Private training provider

- Yes, it would be good if grading of competencies could be shown, but employers may be reluctant to do this because it may affect pay rates. [You could have] three grades: not competent, competent (in which competency can still be improved) and competent with merit (in which competency can't be improved any further). (Private training provider: #1)
- Employee competency profiles could certainly include grades. It would help employers see the strengths of employees. But if you are going to use grades you are going to have to grade both knowledge *and* skills for each competency, which is not an easy thing to do. (Private training provider: #3)
- As a trainer, I would like to see some provision for grading combined with the workplace competency profile. Grades should also incorporate attitudinal factors, so that for a person to meet a distinction or credit grading, they would need to have demonstrated things like independence and initiative. For example: if they could perform the competency under supervision, that would be a pass; if they could perform it under minimal supervision, it becomes a credit; and if they can do it by themselves, it becomes a distinction level. If grades were included [in an employee competency profile] this would provide employers with a clearer picture of the capability of the employee. If [the grades were explained] in a workplace competency profile, it would provide employees with a clearer understanding of what they meant. (Private training provider: #2)
- Grades of competency could be likened to the system of grades for electrical licence that presently exist (that is: grades A, B and C). Grades in profiles could be a good idea if the problems of how to grade them can be overcome. (Trainer – large employer: #3)

Enterprise trainer

- Yes, specifying grades in a workplace competency profile could help indicate to a person the importance of a particular part of the job. Perhaps grades could be specified on a scale of one to ten. It should be left to the particular enterprise to decide on what grade should be specified, that is, what degree of competency they want. For example, in OH&S, do they want just the basics CPR, EAR and that's it, or do they want employees to be able to deal with broken bones, stop bleeding, deal with asthma attacks. (Trainer – large employer: #2)

- There is not much to be gained by specifying levels of competencies in workplace competency profiles. Employers are going to assess levels when they hire an employee and once they see them working. In training, a three grade system is sufficient: not yet competent, competent and competent with merit. (Trainer – large employer: #1)

Other training questionnaire interviewees

- There is no such thing as only competent—some people are better at doing things than others. I still favour the alpha system [F, P, C, D, for fail, pass credit, distinction] for knowledge. But perhaps a simple grading system like *competent/highly competent* might work for the practical aspects. How you measure it is a bit harder to answer. (Employer association: #2)
- There could be some value in an employer stating [grades]. It would emphasise the things the employer especially wants in an employee. An employee's self-esteem and enthusiasm could also benefit from recognition of their high level of competency. (School project officer: #1)

Summary of responses

Interviewees were evenly divided regarding whether or not grades should be specifiable for competencies in workplace competency profiles.

Some of those who were in favour of specifying grades felt that it could counter what they saw as a 'trend towards mediocrity' brought about by the *competency achieved/not achieved* system. Others felt that it could help distinguish between abilities of employees and hence suitability for positions requiring higher levels of ability and responsibility.

Amongst those who were against inclusion of grades of competencies were some who felt that it would lead to undesirable complexity in workplace competency profiles and their systems of use. Others felt that grades would be difficult to determine with consistency and that their specification may encourage enterprises to be too prescriptive, thus limiting opportunities for potentially able employees.

9.15 Do workplace competency profiles have a role as a complement to the licence?

The electrical industry is one in which workers must have a licence before they are legally permitted to work on electrical installations and equipment. In most cases, electrical licences are obtained through completion of an apprenticeship, which essentially comprises on-the-job training and experience plus completion of a prescribed course of study. In completing the requirements for a licence it is expected that a person will acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to work safely in what is recognised as a potentially dangerous industry. However, some people assert that possession of a licence does not, in itself, guarantee a person has the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to work competently in all forms of work covered by the licence.

Table 9.15.1: Responses to the question of whether workplace competency profiles should complement an electrical licence

Interviewee perspective (Questionnaire)	Interviewee category	Licences alone are usually enough.	Licences are almost enough. Matching to w/c profiles could also help.	Licences are not enough. Matching to workplace competency profiles is highly desirable.	Licences are certainly not enough. Matching to workplace competency profiles should be essential.	TOTAL
Enterprise perspective	Enterprise:					
	large		1	2	2	5
	medium			1	4	5
	small		1		4	5
	Employer organisation		1	1	1	3
	Group training	1	2		1	4
	Industry training body			1		1
	Union	1		1		2
TOTAL		**2**	**5**	**6**	**12**	**25**
Training perspective	Industry training body		3	2		5
	TAFE authority		1	1		2
	TAFE institute		1	2	2	5
	Private trg provider			1	3	4
	Enterprise trainer			1	1	2
	Secondary education				1	1
TOTAL			**5**	**7**	**7**	**19**

Based on this premise, interviewees were asked whether they believed possession of a licence was enough to guarantee a person's competence to work in a job in the electrical industry. They were also asked whether it could be useful to match the person's competencies against a workplace competency profile which specified the competencies required for the job. As part of their answer, interviewees were invited to choose from a set of scaled responses. Their scaled responses are summarised in table 9.15.1:

As table 9.15.1 shows, all but two of the 44 interviewees who responded thought that a licence alone was not enough to ensure competency in a job. Of these, 32 felt it was either *highly* desirable or *essential* that a workplace competency profile should be used as a complement to the licence (provided, of course, a suitable workplace competency profile existed).

As was the case for other questions, interviewees were also invited to comment on the issue. The following is a cross-section of their comments.

A licence might be enough

Not all interviewees gave unconditional support to the concept of matching people's competencies to a workplace competency profile as a complement to a licence. Some felt that a properly managed licensing and/or training system could make the complementary role of a workplace competency profile unnecessary:

- If the licence requirements are stringent enough, the licence should take care of almost all the competency requirements. (Enterprise – large: #2)
- Provided the training system is right, then a licence should be enough. But, in reality, this is unlikely. (Group training scheme: #1)
- Provided the requirements for the licence are adhered to then the licence ought to be enough. Employers should first look for the relevant base trade certificate with the appropriate licence and then look at [employees] competencies. It has to be looked at this way rather than just as a collection of competencies. (Union: #2)
- The licence acknowledges that all required modules have been completed and that you have spent a stipulated amount of time on the job. The licence is a safety net—it ensures that electrical workers have got a minimum of knowledge to work safely. (Union: #1)
- A licence should be enough, but it would be wise also to ask to see the person's certificate of competency—to check that what they trained in was appropriate to the job. For example, they might have trained as an electrical mechanic or an electrical fitter. The licence is a safety thing . . . it says you have certainly achieved the competencies of an electrical tradesperson but it does not specify whether as an electrical mechanic or an electrical fitter. The licence requirements are pretty tight in NSW—there are not many people who get a licence without going through a normal full program of training, which is an apprenticeship. (Industry training body: #1)
- [Whether a licence is enough] depends on the [type of] licence, who is issuing it and what it is for. The electrical contractor's licence is OK. But from what I have seen of Austel and air conditioning licences issued in the past—no, they would not be enough. Austel is now making their licensing more stringent. (Industry training body: #2)
- Licences are enough to a certain extent, but they do not indicate competence in all competencies. For example, in communication . . . [I think] a licence

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should be enough to indicate competence to perform normal work tasks. (Group training scheme: #4)

- The underpinning requirement for profiling is the licence. Up to level 5 there is a total reliance on the licence. If an employer was looking for someone to do some work which was additional to level 5 they would need to have some sort of profile to work to. [However,] most employees are employed at level 5. It's rare for an employer to go to the market place to employ someone at, say, level 7—[at that level] they are usually trained and promoted through [the employer's] own system. (Employer association: #3)

Matching against workplace competency profiles is needed because a licence is a poor indicator of competence

The previous comments were generally supportive of licences as an indicator of competence. Balancing these were comments from interviewees who were critical of the value of licences and therefore favoured workplace competency profiles being used as a complement to them.

- You definitely need a profile. Licences are no use at all as indicators of competence on the job. Every one of our new employees is required to do a full day course on installation testing at huge cost, because the licence is not an indicator that they are competent. (Enterprise – medium: #4)
- You definitely need to go beyond a licence—just listen to the questions an employer asks in a job interview. A licence is only the minimum requirement. At the moment your method of determining whether an applicant is trained is basically whether or not they have an A-class licence. They might have received very poor training in one area or another, yet still holds an A-class licence. So, something like a workplace competency profile would certainly help . . . [it] would be a useful reference point. (Enterprise – small: #4)
- The licence alone is worth nothing. I've seen some apprentices go through their training and get an A-class licence and I wouldn't even use them as a first-year apprentice. They've got through their schooling, done their time and they've got a licence, yet they are not competent in anything at all. (Enterprise - small: #5)
- I definitely see the workplace competency profile as a complement to the licence. This is where workplace competency profiles become so important. Licensing is a yes or no matter—you can get a licence with a 50 per cent or a 100 per cent result in assessment . . . [I know of] licensed people who are highly competent and others who are virtually incompetent. (Enterprise – small: #3)
- Licensing requirements are the bare bones minimum . . . to try to ensure people work safely. I personally know of quite a few licensed electricians, especially in heavy industry, who have ended up in a particular type of job or position, and if you were to take them out of that safe haven you could almost say that they'd be dangerous . . . but you wouldn't want [workplace competency] profiles to go too far and have too much in them . . . Job ads used to just specify A-grade electrician, but I haven't seen one like that in years. They now specify A-grade electrician with PLC [programmable logic control], variable speed drives, etc. (Industry training body: #3)
- A licence alone is probably not enough. For example: in job advertisements, employers commonly list requirements—such as a current electrical workers'

permit and a range of other skills like programmable logic control. (TAFE – institute: #2)

- [Workplace competency profiles would be a good complement to licences] provided they are accurate. The profiles would need to be designed with a lot of industry input. [I estimate] that up to 75 per cent of the competencies required are not met by the majority of electricians. Even after they get their licence, they only remain competent in the skills that they actually use. An unrestricted licence for, say, an electrical mechanic is absolute rubbish. Instead, a certificate or licence should be provided for a specific area. Licences with endorsements would be a good idea. Down in Eltham, [Victoria] they issue an N-class licence for neon installers to install high voltage signs and lighting. Electricians with unrestricted licences are also licensed to do it, but they have never been taught it—it's just not in the curriculum. Similar situations exist for appliance servicing. (Private training provider: #3)
- Licences are not enough in their own right. We have some people in this State, with licences, who are unemployable. A workplace competency profile would be a useful complement. (TAFE – institute: #4)
- Licences may be a good indicator of a person's ability, but quite often they are only a broad indicator. Use of a workplace competency profile as well would be a very sensible way of doing things. (TAFE – State authority: #2)
- Just because someone comes in and says they have got an A-class licence doesn't mean a brass razoo to me. We have to make a judgement by seeing them on the job. Even the use of a workplace competency profile doesn't guarantee that they will be able to do the work. We look for people with A class or B class licences but we have found that just because they have a licence does not always mean they have got the ability to do the work that one would expect of a licensed person. Up until end of December 1996 anybody could sit for an Austel licence. They would go and do a two hour test—which most people did in an hour and a half, pay $200, and if they passed, they got an Austel licence . . . they may never have pulled a bit of cable in, or terminated a cable, but they had a licence to do that work. This has now changed. But we must be mindful that just because someone has got a bit of paper doesn't mean they can do the work. (Enterprise – medium: #6)
- A licence is a permit to work. It does not deem competence—only that a person can meet some minimum requirements related to [things like] safety. The ERACC (Electrical Regulating Authority Consultative Committee) has adopted the seven core competencies as recognition of competence for a licence. However, these are less than what the ITAB [Industry Training Advisory Board] would like to have seen. (Industry training body: #4)
- The workplace competency profile should be a useful complement from an employer's perspective. A licence is a permit to do certain types of work—it does not necessarily mean a person is totally competent to do that work, because the permit is only issued on the basis of the person's ability to do certain aspects of the work. (TAFE – State authority: #3)
- You definitely need more than a licence. You need to consider actual on-the-job skills too. (Enterprise – large: #1)

Matching against workplace competency profiles is needed because licences do not reflect experience

Many interviewees felt that matching a person's competencies to a workplace competency profile could be useful because licences did not adequately reflect the work experience of individuals:

- Two people can hold the same licence, yet their competencies are quite different because of the different environment they trained and worked in. There seems to be a move to more specific licences such as domestic wiring, industrial wiring and commercial wiring. If this happens, licences would be a better indicator. At the moment licensing is based on what modules have been done and time served . . . it assumes competence emerges from this. Workplace competency profiles could help authorities to determine what the minimum requirements for a licence should be. Currency is also a consideration. Auditing of work performed, like that proposed for signing off wiring, could be a useful tool to check currency. (Enterprise – large: #6)
- Matching against a profile is certainly needed to complement the licence. A licence does not indicate how well a person can actually perform in the job [including] interacting with a customer and communicating with others. (Enterprise – medium: #5)
- A licence is just a basic requirement . . . like a driving licence. You can get a licence to drive [by being tested] on an automatic [transmission], but that doesn't mean you can drive a manual. (Enterprise – medium: #1)
- [A workplace competency profile would be a useful complement to a licence] because you wouldn't know what a person had done to get their licence—it might be solely on house wiring. All [the licence] means is that they have completed an apprenticeship. (Enterprise – large: #5)
- You really should have a workplace competency profile as a complement. For example: in training to meet licence requirements, a person could work in 26 different areas or could repeat the same thing 26 times—a licence doesn't tell you this. There is also discussion of moving away from licences, so that if a person is declared competent they are able to do the job rather than depend on a licence as evidence [of their competence]. (Group training scheme: #2)
- A person could have served their entire time in a construction environment and have a licence, but not be competent in domestic work. Also, competencies can get out of date. In a few years time people may not be able to get, [say,] an electrical contractor's licence until they can prove experience in that field. (Group training scheme: #3)
- A workplace competency profile is definitely required. If someone comes to [our company] who has not done much more than house wiring they have to be retrained. They need competency in [things like] PLC [programmable logic control]. (Trainer – large employer: #3)
- Employers are going to have to match against workplace competency profiles. An employee could have been trained and worked in a motor winding company, and is therefore excellent in, say, AC motors, but knows nothing about advanced technologies. The modules we teach are only enough to get you a licence—that's all you're looking at. So in some areas specific to industries we may not cover enough. (TAFE – institute: #5)

Matching against workplace competency profiles is needed as an aid to verifying currency of competencies

Some interviewees felt that matching a person's competencies against a workplace competency profile could assist in the process of determining the *currency*, as well as the existence, of the competencies:

- You can't rely on licences—they are too broad. They only show that at some time in your life you have learned the essentials. (Enterprise – small: #2)
- A workplace competency profile could help focus on the currency of competencies. (Private training provider: #2)
- … for example: you may have got an Austel licence four years ago and not been near that work since. The use of a profile can help focus on the currency of competencies. (Trainer – large employer: #2)
- A workplace competency profile should be used as a complement [to a licence]. People can get an Austel licence—but what happens if they don't practise it for three or four years? (Enterprise – large: #3)
- A workplace competency profile is a useful supplement to the licence. The related issue is whether or not the competencies held are current. I know a lot of people with licences who you couldn't let loose in the industry because they would kill themselves—or someone else. (Trainer – large employer: #1)
- Australian soldering standards are being developed, [they are] coming very quickly to our industry. It's not a licence, but companies will have to conform to it to become accredited. I don't think a licence is enough. People who hold licences should keep up to date and be re-assessed, but this doesn't happen . . so a workplace competency profile is an important complement. Licences can be hopeless as indicators of competence. (Enterprise – large: #4)
- A licence by itself is not enough. The competencies covered by a licence may no longer be current. Ideally an employer should conduct a practical test of applicants to see if the competencies in the workplace competency profile are current. (Private training provider: #1)

Summary of responses

Almost all interviewees who responded on this issue felt that under the present system of licensing, at least, licences could not reliably indicate a person's competence on the job. The proposition that workplace competency profiles could be used to complement a licence as an indicator of competence was therefore generally supported.

9.16 How good are credentials (like certificates and diplomas) as indicators of competency on the job?

This was asked as a preliminary to the next question (which dealt with whether or not credentials such as certificates and diplomas from training providers should be included in workplace competency profiles). It was asked with a view to giving further insight into *why* interviewees thought certificates should or should not be included.

The type of credentials on which the question focussed were certificates, diplomas, and the like, issued by training providers, rather than documentary evidence of training and experience on the job, such as completed indentureship papers. To ensure this distinction was not lost in the interview, the credentials being spoken of were generally referred to as *certificates*. For convenience, this terminology is also retained in reporting the responses. It should be noted that in the electrical industry, associate diplomas and diplomas are academically higher-level awards than (trade) certificates. However, the latter require a much larger component of on-the-job training.

Table 9.16.1: Responses to the question regarding how good credentials, like certificates and diplomas, are as indicators of competency on the job

Interviewee perspective (Questionnaire)	Interviewee category	Certificates and diplomas are excellent indicators of competence on the job.	Certificates and diplomas are good indicators of competence on the job.	Certificates and diplomas are fair indicators of competence on the job.	Certificates and diplomas are poor indicators of competence on the job.	TOTAL
	Enterprise:					
	large			3	1	4
	medium		1	3	1	5
	small			1	3	4
Enterprise perspective	Employer organisation		1	1	1	3
	Group training			2	2	4
	Industry training body				1	1
	Union			1	1	2
TOTAL			**2**	**11**	**10**	**23**
	Industry training body			2	1	3
	TAFE authority		2		1	3
	TAFE institute			4		2
Training perspective	Private trg provider			2	1	3
	Enterprise trainer			1	1	2
	Union				1	1
TOTAL			**2**	**9**	**5**	**16**

Certificates are not good indicators of competence on the job

As table 9.16.1 shows, 35 of the 39 interviewees who utilised the rating scale in describing the usefulness of certificates as indicators of competence on the job rated them as either fair or poor indicators. This result was not altogether unexpected because the credentials are awarded for completion of training which is mostly provided off the job. The following is a sample of the comments from interviewees who felt certificates were not good indicators of competence on the job:

- [Certificates] are only a fair indicator of competence on the job. I have had experience of people who have high-level certificates but who are poor in their practical ability or in their communication skills. (Enterprise – medium: #5)
- A certificate is generally only an indication of time spent in a class and possession of knowledge. It is not a good indicator of competence on the job. (Private training provider: #3)
- Certificates are an indicator of underpinning knowledge but they do not indicate competence on the job. TAFE says if you have an associate diploma you will be very good on the job, but all it really shows is that you have got an ability to swot. Unless you have had proper work experience in the [relevant] areas then you can't be competent. (Union: #1)
- Certificates give no indication of competence on the job. They indicate that a person can pass exams. (Enterprise – small: #1)
- ... they [certificates] are a poor indication of competence on the job because on-the-job competencies are not assessed. (Industry training body: #2)
- [Certificates] are not indicators of competence [on the job]. TAFE would readily say that they are not in the business of providing competence, they provide underpinning knowledge. (Industry training body: #4)
- TAFE's role is not to say whether a person is competent *on the job*—that is for the employer to decide . . . certificates are a moderate indicator of competence on the job. (TAFE – institute: #1)
- Certificates are not generally a good indicator [of competency on the job] unless the person has done a specific course directly relevant to the job, such as the one for lift mechanics at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, or has done a course and obtained a scaffolding ticket or rigger's certificate. (Enterprise – medium: #1)

Certificates are useful indicators of competence on the job

Interviewees who saw value in certificates as indicators of competence on the job gave a variety of reasons in support of their views. In their comments, many recognised that there were limitations in the usefulness of certificates for this purpose:

- Certificates are indicators of competence [on the job]. You are more likely to get a competent person coming through TAFE than you are in one who has learnt on the job. They show a person is capable of working and absorbing at a certain level and has been through some structured training. But not everyone with a certificate is competent. (Enterprise – medium: #3)
- Certificates are a fair indicator of a person's understanding but not specifically in how they do their work. A certificate would be a reasonable indicator of competencies 1 to 8 on the sample profile [key competencies plus ability to work independently]. We would have to assess the rest ourselves. (Enterprise - small: #5)
- Usually, people who do well in their TAFE course are good on the job, although there are exceptions. If a person is not passing their trade course then they would usually struggle on the job. (Group training scheme: #4)
- I would put about 50 per cent trust in them [as indicators of competence on the job], actually. You certainly couldn't put total faith in a certificate or other

formal qualification. However, they are one of the things an employer might look for in addition to experience. (TAFE – institute: #4)

- If someone is competent on the job we certainly look at certification for the technical knowledge which may be needed to further develop a person's on-the-job competence. If a person has PLC experience with one company and wants to move across to another, the new company will look for the certificate because it is not [enterprise] specific—it says you can commission PLCs generally, not just the ones you were doing for the previous company. (Employer association: #3)
- Certificates are only an indicator. People shouldn't rely on them too much. But if there are no other indicators, they are a useful tool. For example, for an employer selecting for an apprenticeship the prevocational certificate is a useful indicator. (TAFE – institute: #3)
- It depends on where the award was obtained. Economic constraints can affect the standard of training and assessing which can reduce the usefulness of the award as an indicator of competence. Certificates can be a good indicator if there is sufficient rigour in the system through which they are obtained. (TAFE – State authority: #3)
- [Certificates are] a pretty good indicator that a person knows their stuff—if the assessment is of a good standard—there have been cases of people who have failed numerous modules, yet they still passed through the system with questionable competence. You still hear of them occasionally. (Industry training body: #3)
- [Certificates are] generally a pretty good indication of [a person's] technical knowledge and understanding—but regarding the application of knowledge and understanding, they sometimes don't mean much at all. (Trainer – large employer: #3)
- A certificate may only indicate that a person has successfully demonstrated competence once. It can be used as an initial filter, after which other things must be looked at. (Enterprise – large: #6)
- I attach less importance to what the certificate is than to the fact that the employee has sacrificed the time and effort to get it. [However] if [the person has been] successful, it also indicates the person has the ability to learn and work with new things. (Enterprise – medium: #4)

Making certificates better indicators of competence on the job

A few interviewees referred to efforts under way to make certificates better indicators of competence on the job:

- To date, certificates have not been good indicators of competence on the job. However, industry is working towards bridging the gap so that off-the-job training better reflects competencies. (Union: #2)
- For people who do the Electrotechnology Manufacturing Certificate and the Associate Diploma in Electronics, the training is generally excellent, the only difficulty is that the TAFE teachers have not had their skills upgraded and they are not current with industry requirements at the moment. For example: in soldering we pay for internal training because the TAFE training is too low a standard for us. We are trying to get modules for fine pitch surface mount technology put in to the curriculum because the certificate is becoming out of date. Other parts of the courses are excellent. (Enterprise – large: #4)

- In many industries there have historically been barriers between what happens on the job and what happens off the job. Diplomas and certificates in some industries have always been highly valued. TAFE is striving to provide training which is more closely aligned to the workplace. As this happens the parchments will become better indicators of competence in the workplace. (TAFE – State authority: #2)

Summary of responses

The majority of interviewees did not see credentials, such as certificates and diplomas, as good indicators of competence on the job. Reasons given were generally based on the premise that the credentials predominantly reflected knowledge, skills and attitudes gained off the job.

9.17 Should credentials be included in a workplace competency profile or just the competencies to which they relate?

Table 9.17.1: Responses to the question: Should credentials, like certificates and diplomas, be included in workplace competency profiles?

Interviewee perspective (Questionnaire)	Interviewee category	Yes: certificates and diplomas should be shown in workplace competency profiles.	No: certificates and diplomas should not be shown in workplace competency profiles.	TOTAL
Enterprise perspective	Enterprise: large	1	2	3
	medium	5	1	6
	small	3	2	5
	Employer organisation	3		3
	Group training	2	1	3
	Industry training body		1	1
	Union	1	1	2
TOTAL		**15**	**8**	**23**
Training perspective	Industry training body	4	1	5
	TAFE authority	1	1	2
	TAFE institute	5		5
	Private trg provider	1	3	4
	Enterprise trainer		1	1
	Secondary education	1		1
TOTAL		**12**	**6**	**18**

Although credentials such as certificates and diplomas awarded by training providers are not competencies, they may serve as an indicator of at least some components of competence, especially underpinning knowledge and attitudes.,

With this in mind, interviewees were asked whether they felt there would be any benefit in including certificates, diplomas and the like in workplace competency profiles. In this context, the workplace competency profiles referred to were mainly those likely to be drawn up for specific positions by enterprises and the more generic ones drawn up by industry bodies. The few interviewees who also commented on inclusion of credentials in *employee competency profiles*, drawn up by individuals to list their own competencies, all felt that they had a place in that type of document.

As for the previous question, the type of credentials referred to were certificates, diplomas, and similar awards issued by training providers, rather than documentary evidence of training and experience on the job, such as completed indentureship papers. The credentials being spoken of were therefore generally referred to in interviews as *certificates* to ensure this distinction was not lost. For convenience, this terminology is retained in the following report on the responses.

Arguments in support of including certificates in workplace competency profiles

There were a few common themes in the comments interviewees made in support of including certificates in workplace competency profiles. The responses which follow have been grouped accordingly.

Include certificates in workplace competency profiles to provide a clearer picture of what a job requires

- Yes, [certificates should be included]. It would help an employee understand what the employer is looking for. (Employer association: #1)
- Yes, certificates should be stated in the profile. It helps give the overall picture of what is required, particularly in regard to understanding. (School project officer: #1)
- I would see great value in listing certificates in a workplace competency profile. The workplace competency profile would then tell an employee *these are the competencies that are required and these certificates are the things the employer values*. It could influence people's choices in training—which would be to the employer's advantage. (TAFE – State authority: #2)
- Certificates like Austel and PLC should be listed. It helps to highlight specific areas of work which the employer wants the employee to work in. (Enterprise – small: #3)
- Yes, it could be useful to list certificates. Listing certificates, like PLC, [in a workplace competency profile] will also help people understand what type of work they are going to be required to do. (Union: #1)
- A riggers' certificate, a welding certificate, even a driving licence, if required for the job, should be specified in the workplace competency profile. You could even include a HSC as a minimum. (Group training scheme: #4)

- Certificates should be included as part of the workplace competency profile. Our company includes them. For example, we recently took on several people as workplace trainers. Part of the agreement was that they would undertake specified training. In such cases a workplace competency profile could list the certificates needed. (Enterprise – medium: #3)

One interviewee saw the inclusion of certificates in workplace competency profiles as a means of specifying competencies from other industry sectors:

- Yes, it would be good if employers listed required certificates in a workplace competency profile. For example, it could be useful for [one company I know of] to list elective modules such as hydraulics and pneumatics, which they would like their electrical employees to be competent in. If employers were more specific about what they expect an employee to do, then they could have some influence on the curriculum. (TAFE – institute: #5)

Inclusion of certificates as a means of ensuring possession of underpinning knowledge

- Yes, certificates should be specified—as the underpinning knowledge. (Union: #1)
- I would probably have to say that certificates should be specified. But only as a means of ensuring the person has the underpinning knowledge required. (Industry training body: #6)
- Yes, it could be useful to list certificates. The new standards will place special emphasis on the need, not only for on-the-job experience, but for evidence of underpinning knowledge as well. (Union: #1)
- You need to distinguish what the certificate covers. If the certificate reflects underpinning knowledge obtained ~~in~~ off-the-job training, then it has limited usefulness. If it covers training obtained on the job (e.g. in a *sandwich* course in which a considerable part of the training is on the job), then it could be very useful and worthwhile listing in a workplace competency profile. (Industry training body: #5)

Inclusion of certificates in workplace competency profiles for the purpose of matching to qualification or pay levels

- Yes, absolutely, [certificates] should be included [in a workplace competency profile]. We are still a long way from being perfect in assessing people's competence. If a person has gone through training and acquired a certificate, we know that at least they have achieved something—they will be better for it, even if they are still not competent. It would be similar to what is specified in job advertisements. In the case of [two car manufacturers] there is a qualification part to it too: to elevate to the next level in the pay structure, you must have, in addition to matching the profile, three modules of accredited training, or their equivalent, per level. (Enterprise – large: #5)
- Yes, it is appropriate [to include certificates in workplace competency profiles]. The listing of a PLC certificate is a good example. Unless you have got a very active and proficient training section in a company or a department, there is no way a person can be fully trained in a complex skill purely in the workplace. This could change, but at present the majority of employers do not have the resources and skills to provide all the training necessary for complex skills. Local paper mills have drawn up lists of

competencies for determining pay levels. These lists include some TAFE subjects as well. (TAFE – institute: #1)

- [Our company] actually does specify certificates in their models [profiles]. For example, to go from level 2 to level 3 it is specified in the model that you will need a PLC certificate from TAFE. Specifying certificates makes people aware of what they need. (Trainer – large employer: #3)

More valuable to include higher-level certificates in workplace competency profiles

- Yes, it would be useful to be able to specify certificates in the workplace competency profile. It would probably be more important for the more advanced level of employee who has done more than just apprentice training. This could also be extended to specifying training on particular makes of equipment. (Enterprise – small: #4)
- For many years Western Australia had an Advanced Certificate in Electrotechnology. It had various electives to suit particular industries like mining and manufacturing. Industries liked it, but it was not competency based and was dropped. However, if it was still around, employers might want to specify the certificates in workplace competency profiles. (TAFE – institute: #4)

Include certificates in workplace competency profiles: They are already included in job advertisements

- Yes there could be some advantage in specifying certificates in workplace competency profiles. Job ads do it. [They] used to just specify *A-grade electrician*, but I haven't seen one like that in years. Now they specify A-grade electrician *with* PLC, variable speed drives, etc. (Industry training body: #3)
- A lot of employers list [required] certificates in job advertisements. They could be specified in a workplace competency profile, but would require other evidence of relevant competence as well. (TAFE – institute: #3)

List certificates in employee competency profiles

- . . . if a certificate is listed in an employee profile it is an indication that the employee is enthusiastic and willing to extend their competencies. (Enterprise – small: #3)
- . . . I don't have any objection to listing certificates in employees' personal profiles. When they are listed in an employee's personal profile, it makes the employee more saleable. Particularly certificates for special competencies. (Union: #2)
- Yes, the certificate needs to be there [in an employee competency profile]. For example: if you come to a company with some Austel experience and you have a letter from an employer that says you can do it—it's not the same as from an independent assessor. It needs to be formally recognised by somebody that's in the business of recognising skills and attributes rather than by another employer. (Employer association: #3)

Arguments against including certificates in workplace competency profiles

Interviewees gave several reasons for not including certificates in workplace competency profiles. The most common argument against inclusion was that competencies rather than their associated certificates should be the central focus. Other reasons were that it might be too easy for employers to over-specify requirements or that certificates related to underpinning knowledge rather than competence on the job.

List the competencies not the certificates

- Rather than specify a certificate, it is better to specify the competencies or skills that are embedded in the certificate. A certificate is only a general thing anyway. Like a [university] degree, it indicates a level of learning but does not specify the competencies learned. (TAFE – State authority: #3)
- Certificates should not be listed. Instead the work that the certificate applies to is the important thing and that is what should be specified. (Enterprise – medium: #4)
- An employer may specify an Austel licence in a job advertisement, but at interview will be more interested in whether the person can do the work it implies. The *type of work* therefore is what needs to be in the workplace competency profile. (Employer association: #2)
- You should not be listing certificates, you should be listing competencies. You can specify the certificates in terms of competencies. (Private training provider: #1)
- There is not much to be gained by listing [certificates] in a workplace competency profile. A certificate on its own does not say you are competent. It is not really a competency anyway. (Industry training body: #1)

Inclusion of certificates may influence employers to specify unnecessary requirements

- I do not think an employer should specify certificates in a workplace competency profile for a job because there is a risk that they would over-specify . . . [because] off-the-job training [for the certificates] did not match up to the competencies required on the job. If there was a good match, then the employer would not be as likely to over-specify, and specifying certificates would not be such a problem. (Union: #2)
- [If certificates are included in workplace competency profiles] . . . employers may be tempted to over-specify thus barring otherwise good people from a job. (Private training provider: #3)
- No, I don't think certificates should be specified. They are not a good indicator of on-the-job competence, and [if specified] could actually filter out a lot of competent employees [who did not have the certificate]. RPL should help overcome this [by enabling competent individuals to gain the relevant certificates through recognition], but many would not apply for it. (Private training provider: #2)

Certificates focus on theory rather than practice

- There is not much point in having certificates listed in a profile because the issue is whether they can really apply the theory and do the work, rather than whether they can pass the theory assessments. (Trainer – large employer: #1)

Better to specify certificates separately from the workplace competency profile

- Certificates should not be specified as part of a workplace competency profile. If an employer wants to draw attention to them they could do so on a separate document or at the bottom of the workplace competency profile. (Enterprise – large: #2)

Summary of responses

Despite credentials such as certificates and diplomas not being regarded as good indicators of competency on the job, two thirds of the 41 interviewees who responded on this issue felt that it could be helpful if they were included in workplace competency profiles. It was thought that inclusion of credentials could: more clearly define what an employee would be expected to do; help individuals better plan their training in order to get a job; ensure individuals possessed necessary underpinning knowledge; and help determine the level of a particular position in the workplace. Inclusion of credentials in an employee competency profile could: help indicate a person's underpinning knowledge and other special skills; help determine a person's qualifications and pay level; and indicate a person's general ability and enthusiasm for the work. Whilst a credential is not a competency, it is evidence that an individual possesses one or more competencies, provided the training and assessment for the credential are of a sufficiently high standard.

Those who did not feel credentials should be included commonly argued that credentials were not competencies and that the competencies implied by the credentials should be included instead. Also mentioned was the possibility that enterprises might be tempted to specify credentials in excess of their real requirements and so unfairly bar individuals who were competent to perform the work. Even where a credential was validly specified, individuals who were competent in all that it covered might not possess the credential and so still be ineligible for the job. Recognition of prior learning should help in such cases, but for various reasons may not be pursued.

9.18 Will enterprises be reluctant to draw up workplace competency profiles?

During the first few interviews, it became apparent from discussions that possible reluctance of enterprises to develop workplace competency profiles was an issue which should be investigated. The most common reasons suggested for such reluctance were: industrial implications (particularly the possibility that employees may need to be paid more if the full extent of competencies required for the job were revealed), the cost of any training found to be necessary, and the extra time and effort involved in developing and implementing workplace competency profiles. As the issue was seen to be important to successful implementation of workplace competency profiles in the workplace, should such action be pursued, it was raised via an additional question in all subsequent interviews.

The 27 interviewees who were able to give definitive answers were fairly evenly divided: 14 felt that enterprises might be resistant to drawing up workplace competency profiles, 13 felt resistance would be minimal. Table 9.18.1 shows the pattern of responses.

Table 9.18.1: Responses to the question: Will employers be resistant to drawing up workplace competency profiles?

Interviewee perspective (Questionnaire)	Interviewee category	Enterprises will be resistant to drawing up workplace competency profiles.	Enterprises will not be resistant to drawing up workplace competency profiles.	TOTAL
Enterprise perspective	Enterprise: large	1	2	3
	medium	3	1	4
	small	2	2	4
	Employer organisation		3	3
	Industry training body		1	1
	Union	1	1	2
TOTAL		7	10	**17**
Training perspective	Industry training body	4	1	5
	TAFE authority	1		1
	TAFE institute		1	1
	Private trg provider	2		2
	Enterprise trainer		1	1
TOTAL		7	3	**10**

Enterprises will be reluctant to use workplace competency profiles

The following is a sample of comments from interviewees who thought that enterprises could be reluctant to develop workplace competency profiles.

Reluctance to implement due to cost of wages and training

Of the interviewees who felt that enterprises might be reluctant to develop, (or use) workplace competency profiles, the largest proportion thought it would be because of the possibility that a workplace competency profile might be used as justification for higher wages to be paid:

- Employers won't like to draw up workplace competency profiles that will result in higher wages being paid. They could also be worried that extra training to meet competencies they do not need may have linkage to awards and so cost the employer more wages. It would seem a bit unfair to expect employers to provide training and pay higher wages for competencies they don't need. (Private training provider: #2)

- Yes [potential cost] could hold employers back from drawing up workplace competency profiles. Most of my workers have had extra training. For example: I've got them pilots' licences—we have our own plane. By the time I sat down and put down everything they can do, I might have to pay them more money. Employees might say 'Look what I can do, I should be able to get more money'. I'd like to pay them twice as much, but you can't. (Enterprise – small: #1)
- The ITAB is finding more and more in its dealings with industry that it's damn near impossible to separate the industrial relations implications from the curriculum. It's likely that some employers may be reluctant to draw up profiles because of the risk of it costing them more money. [However] profiles would help people get paid what they are really worth. (Industry training body: #6)
- If dollars come into it, then there could be some resistance [by employers to the use of workplace competency profiles]. However, it should not be a major hindrance to employers using workplace competency profiles. One factor to bear in mind, though, is the dollar cost of developing the workplace competency profile in the first place. (Enterprise – small: #2)
- [Employers' reluctance to use workplace competency profiles] is an issue. You also have the problem that if a salary is attached to the profile, everyone will quickly move through the profile and get the top rate after which they will just sit and slowly lose their skills. (Enterprise – medium: #3)
- It is very likely that this could be a problem [for employers]. In the English system, it was found that when qualifications were directly related to wage scales, some people simply over-trained themselves, and priced themselves out of the employment market. (Employer association: #2)

The issue of whether employees should be paid for competencies they do not use was also mentioned:

- [There may be] a problem [of employer resistance to using workplace competency profiles], particularly where higher-level competencies are in common use. Where a worker has higher-level competencies, some say the employer should only have to pay at the higher level if the worker is frequently using them. Others, including me, would argue that the employer has the benefit of having those skills on call and should therefore pay at the higher rate—just the same as a manager gets paid for his competencies, even though he is often only doing what his secretary does. (TAFE – State authority: #3)

Other factors inhibiting acceptance of workplace competency profiles by enterprises

Other interviewees thought enterprises may be reluctant to embrace workplace competency profiles because of employee apprehension, training implications, the need for negotiation, or time-consuming obligations. One suggests that the demands on time could be reduced by making a set of basic workplace competency profiles available:

- What could be a problem would be resistance from *employees* who might tend to see a profile for them in negative terms because it identifies some people as more competent than others. Although this situation [some more competent than others] already exists, it is not formalised —workplace competency profiles would formalise it. (Enterprise – small: #3)

- I think there is a fear [of the introduction of workplace competency profiles] amongst employees. One of the biggest problems was getting the employees to agree to drawing up individual profiles for themselves. They felt it was intrusive and could be used to sack them, but when it was explained to them that it was not, and that it could benefit them, it was not a problem. Handled correctly it was not that way at all. (Enterprise – large: #5)
- Employers might be reluctant to draw up workplace competency profiles because of industrial implications. Employers sometimes skirt around the problem in job advertisements by saying *and other duties as directed*—which tells an employee nothing. Putting things in a workplace competency profile not only implies that an employee should be paid for what they are actually doing, but also that *training is required* if the employee can't do it—which is another expense. (Industry training body: #3)
- [Reluctance to use workplace competency profiles] could be a problem with the smaller employer. [Our large company] has had a lot of problems between the unions and the company arguing about what the levels should contain in the [model profiles] which have been developed. Some smaller employers may not want to have to contend with these difficulties. (Trainer – large employer: #3)
- I think employers would ask why would they want go out of their way to produce their own requirements on top of the existing industry requirements. I feel sure there would be industrial relations implications. Most employers, particularly the smaller ones, probably couldn't be bothered. It's likely that these [smaller] employers would accept the basic generic workplace competency profiles and work with them, but would not be prepared to go out on a limb and develop their own. (Industry training body: #1)

Enterprises will not be reluctant to use workplace competency profiles

Interviewees who felt enterprises would accept workplace competency profiles thought they would do so for a variety of reasons.

Payment for competencies identified through workplace competency profiles

The issue of payment for competencies was again mentioned, but was not viewed as a serious impediment. Many thought employers would see benefits in paying employees according to the competencies identified in workplace competency profiles.

- If a person's job is such that they are continually using particular competencies, I think most employers would have no objection to paying the person accordingly. If a person has a competency which is not used in the workplace then they should not be paid for that competency. If new competencies are used in the job then a new work contract should be drawn up. (Trainer – large employer: #1)
- Everything on the sample workplace competency profile is what would be expected of a typical electrical worker who has done four years of training, therefore there should not be a problem. Providing the person is doing the

work, they should be being paid accordingly . . . fair employers should not have any reason to resist drawing up workplace competency profiles. (Enterprise – large: #1)

- An employer would be mad to be worried about having to pay more money [through using workplace competency profiles]. If you are going to get the right person for the job you want done, you have to pay accordingly. If you don't, then you won't keep the employee. (Enterprise – medium: #4)
- Only short-sighted employers would be influenced by the perceived risk of industrial implications [through using workplace competency profiles]. Employers who genuinely want able employees, and intend to keep them, would be paying them accordingly anyway. Therefore, industrial implications are not a problem. (Enterprise – small: #3)

Better selection of employees and utilisation of their competencies

Others thought employers would see benefits in better selection of employees and utilisation of their competencies through the use of workplace competency profiles.

- It is more likely that employers would see the benefits [of using workplace competency profiles] as outweighing the disadvantages. They would enable employers to use their workforce better. Many in large industry don't really know what their employees are qualified in. [A workplace competency profile] would be a good tool for personnel management and allocating work so that workers can work effectively and safely. (Enterprise – large: #2)
- . . . on the plus side, by using both employer workplace competency profiles and employee [competency] profiles, employers would be more able to identify their more valuable people. (Enterprise – small: #3)
- I don't think industrial implications would be a hindrance to the use of workplace competency profiles by employers. If an employee has got the skills and they are being used in the workplace, and are getting the work done and keeping the client happy, they are obviously worth more money than someone who has got no skills at all. That's the problem at the moment, everyone is classed as an A-class at the one level, and 75 per cent of the workforce just does the job while the other 25 per cent put the extra effort in and are not rewarded enough. (Enterprise - small: #5)
- Australia has to get away from seeing training only as a cost and to see it as buying a resource, instead. Until this situation is improved there will be a risk that some employers will be reluctant to draw up workplace competency profiles. However, the astute employer will see it as a useful tool to help make sure they get the person they want—then both the employer and the employee will be satisfied—whereas underpaid and, ultimately, dissatisfied employees will be bad for business. (Union: #1)
- Yes, industrial implications will be a hindrance to acceptance of workplace competency profiles by employers. But something is fundamentally wrong if an employer is afraid to state what an employee is expected to do. It should be remembered that the workplace competency profile an employer draws up is *what the job requires*, not *what the employee can do*. It is more a matter of educating management. There are many people in key positions in companies who really don't realise what the benefits of workplace competency profiles are. There needs to be a selling job done—for example, by saying if the

company is to remain QA [quality assurance] certified they have to be able to identify the skills required to do a job. (Enterprise – large: #3)

- I don't think [employers' reluctance to use workplace competency profiles] would be a problem. Workplace competency profiles would be useful because employers need to be able to specify precisely what they want an employee to have before they will pay them more money, and the employee, through the unions, really needs the same information. Most of the bigger industries in Tasmania have already set up the process anyway because they use them to create the career paths for their employees. For example, local paper mills have already drawn up lists of competencies for determining pay levels—the lists include some TAFE subjects as well. Unions use them as a reference point just like the employer does. The hardest part is to get them to accept the initial document. Employers would tailor the initial workplace competency profile to suit their own needs. (TAFE – institute: #1)

Litigational aspects of the use of workplace competency profiles

Two interviewees felt there could be litigational aspects to the use of workplace competency profiles—one saw risks of litigation if they were used carelessly, the other saw them as a possible defence against litigation.

- Yes, employers may be reluctant to draw [workplace competency profiles] up because it could give people ammunition to get more money. It could also leave you open to allegations of discrimination—unfortunately, we have gone overboard on political correctness. You would need to be careful in the way they are drawn up. (Enterprise – medium: #2)
- There would not really be a problem [regarding employers' reluctance to use workplace competency profiles], although employers may be a bit hesitant at first, just as unions may be a bit hesitant. Indirectly, the gradual trend towards taking issues to court may support the use of workplace competency profiles. In the event of an accident or a disputed job standard, employers may be called upon to justify how they knew a person was competent. The fact that an employer has a profile and has ensured the employee meets the requirements may be the employer's only defence. The employer may also find workplace competency profiles and employee competency profiles useful for monitoring *currency* of competence, which may also become an issue. (Industry training body: #4)

Workplace competency profiles as a tool in enterprise bargaining

One interviewee felt that the value of workplace competency profiles to employers in the process of enterprise bargaining and award interpretations would act as an encouragement for employers to use them.

- Industrial implications are unlikely to be a hindrance to the implementation of workplace competency profiles because, I think, they will be a 'fix' [in regard to some industrial processes]. There is the problem now, for instance, where the unions have a push for employment to level 6 and the industry doesn't have a clearly defined set of profiles that would make up a level 6 person. NSW and ACT, in conjunction with the union, have come up with a list of things that a profile should include for a person to be employed at level 6. But if employers did nothing, then the union would be in a better position to say—'well, anything will be level 6'. Employers would definitely have something to gain by using them. With the enterprise bargaining agreements, our association has done a lot of work for companies that work in the higher technology field to grade their people based on profiles. So that when someone claims they should be paid the same as another person, employers can go back to their enterprise bargaining agreement and determine what the level should be. Profiles would definitely assist in award interpretations. There is a problem with the new generic standards—they are not award related whereas the ECIA ones are. (Employer association: #3)

Another felt that enterprises would see workplace competency profiles as a means of moving to enterprise bargaining—with potential risks for employees:

- I don't think employers will be reluctant to draw up workplace competency profiles because of industrial implications. In fact, employers will see the workplace competency profiles as an opportunity to move to enterprise bargaining and even bypass the unions. Employees may be taken advantage of if they allow this to happen without proper consultation. To minimise this risk, it is important that the competencies reflect appropriate training such as TAFE certificates, and are not just competencies in name only. (Union: #2)

Summary of responses

Taken overall. interviewees were fairly evenly divided on the question of whether or not enterprises might be reluctant to draw up and use workplace competency profiles. Of those who thought there might be some resistance, the majority thought it would be because enterprises feared the possibility that a workplace competency profile they drew up might be used as justification for higher wages. Other common reasons included: the cost of additional training needed for employees who could not match the profile, a need for negotiation (with employees and unions) to settle issues encountered in drawing up workplace competency profiles, issues which might arise from their implementation (including claims of discrimination), and time needed to be spent on all the associated processes.

Those who did not think enterprises would be resistant to workplace competency profiles felt they would see benefits arising from their use as outweighing any monetary costs. The benefits could include improved employee selection processes, better recognition and utilisation of competencies used in their workplaces, better planning of training, better employee satisfaction, and clearer determination of pay rates. Also mentioned was the possibility that workplace competency profiles might be used by enterprises in litigation to demonstrate that they matched employee competencies to job requirements.

10 Responses from apprentices and employees

Note:

1 Editing of comments

Although interviewees' responses were tape recorded, they have not been transcribed verbatim into this report. Some editing has been performed to remove parts which were not pertinent to the issue and to improve grammar so as to reduce length and make the comments easier to read. Special care was taken to ensure that the edited comments remained consistent with the interviewees' original responses. The edited responses were forwarded to all interviewees for verification prior to their inclusion in this report.

2 Sources of comments

Sources of comments are indicated by means of the interviewee's work role in parentheses at the end of each comment.

3 Sample workplace competency profile

A copy of the sample workplace competency profile, which is referred to in the comments, can be found in appendix 11.2.

As well as representatives of enterprises and training providers, six employees were also interviewed. The employee group consisted of two apprentices in their third year, three in their fourth year and a qualified field technician with more than 20 years of experience. Three of the apprentices were employed through group training schemes, one, incidentally, stating that during the four years of his apprenticeship he had worked for more than 20 employers. Because of this group's different perspective, a separate set of questions was used. The following is a summary of the questions and their responses:

10.1 What information about your course or training program were you given before you commenced training?

From their responses to this question, it appeared that none of the interviewees received much information. Some felt that it was due to the way they entered the industry:

- ❖ I was very disappointed with what I was told at secondary school . . . I was basically told there were no jobs out there and the only option was to think of further training. I was given no information about apprenticeships generally, let alone about electrical work. A week before I started with [the group training organisation], we all went in for a day where they explained what the apprenticeship would involve. My father was an electrician in the country, so

I knew what electricians did and had a fair idea of what I would be studying. (Apprentice – senior: #1)

- I originally had no intention of being an electrician. The job just came up, so the only initial information I had was when I went in to the company and saw what they did. I was not given any career counselling about electrical . . . went into it straight out of Year 12. If I had got something like the sample workplace competency profile it would have increased my interest in a career as an electrician. (Apprentice – senior: #2)
- I had a fairly good chat with a friend who is in the industry, but other than that was not given much before starting my apprenticeship. Once I was in the apprenticeship, I was given information about the modules. I never saw anything like a workplace competency profile before starting my apprenticeship. (Apprentice – senior: #3)
- Basically I got my information about careers and courses [in the electrical industry] from my next door neighbour who is an electrician. He helped me get my apprenticeship. All the information was pretty much oral. (Apprentice – senior: #4)
- I spent time with my employer for work experience, then returned to school and completed Year 12. After leaving school, I worked at [a shoe store] for a year, then my father, who worked in the building trade, helped me get an apprenticeship with my [work experience] employer. So really I was told very little about courses before I started. I never received anything like a workplace competency profile—how long have they been around? I've never heard of them before. (Apprentice – senior: #5)
- Regarding the job: I received *Metals and Engineering Competency Standards Units* plus *Philips* competency standards from the employer. Not much information has been given out about the course I am just starting at TAFE. (Employee: #1)

10.2 How did the information you were given compare with a workplace competency profile such as the sample profile?

Because they had received so little information, not all interviewees felt able to answer this question.

- I never got a workplace competency profile, but one like the sample would have been helpful. (Apprentice – senior: #2)
- The sample profile matches what has been covered in the apprenticeship reasonably closely—it covers all the topics. (Apprentice – senior: #3)
- The sample workplace competency profile contains a lot more information than what I received. All I knew when I started was that there were lights and power points. I knew nothing about what I would be doing like it is spelt out in the profile. I never got to see anything like a workplace competency profile. (Apprentice – senior: #4)

10.3 How closely did your actual training outcomes match those you were led to expect from the information you were given?

Again, because they had received so little information, not all interviewees felt able to answer the question.

- It's hard to answer because I had little to go on before starting. (Apprentice – senior: #4)
- What I have learnt has matched fairly well what I saw as a basic outline of what the training and opportunities the company offered (Apprentice – senior: #2)
- My on-the-job training has turned out as I expected because I knew all the workers there and [knew] what they did from work experience. My college study has given me no surprises except recently when we started on motors. (Apprentice – senior: #5)
- The outcomes of training were very uncertain . . . they were not mentioned at the beginning of the course. (Employee: #1)

10.4 How easy to follow was the format of the sample workplace competency profile (i.e. the way it was set out)?

This question originally referred to workplace competency profiles the interviewees actually used. However, because they had not seen a workplace competency profile, the focus of the question shifted to the sample profile instead. Table 10.4.1 summarises the responses.

Table 10.4.1: Ease with which format of the sample workplace competency profile could be followed

	Very easy	Easy	Moderately easy	Hard	Very hard	TOTAL
Apprentice:						
third year	2					2
fourth year	1	1				2
Experienced employee			1			1
TOTAL	3	1	1			5

As shown by the table, most interviewees thought the format did not present any difficulty.

- It's a pretty basic sort of thing . . . easy to follow. If you put any more stuff in it would become harder to follow. (Apprentice – senior: #2)
- I like the type of thing like 1 and 2 shown at the bottom of the workplace competency profile [range statements]. They could be extended over the page. (Apprentice – senior: #4)

10.5 How easy to follow was the language and terminology of the sample workplace competency profile?

Like the previous question, this originally referred to any workplace competency profiles the interviewees actually used. However, because they had not seen a workplace competency profile, the focus of the question shifted to the sample profile instead. Table 10.5.1 summarises the responses.

Table 10.5.1: Ease with which language and terminology of the sample workplace competency profile could be followed

	Very easy	Easy	Moderately easy	Hard	Very hard	TOTAL
Apprentice:						
third year	1	1				2
fourth year	1	1				2
Experienced employee			1			1
TOTAL	**2**	**2**	**1**			**5**

As shown by the table, most interviewees thought the language and terminology used did not present any difficulty. However, three of the interviewees (one fourth-year and two-third year apprentices) added that they felt the language and terminology would only be moderately easy for someone not familiar with the trade:

- Before I started, I would have needed some explanation of the terms in the profile . . . the jargon, like what a scaffolding is and what a wiring enclosure is, would need explaining, perhaps this could be on a separate sheet. After starting the job, the workplace competency profile would be easy to follow. (Apprentice – senior: #4)
- [The workplace competency profile] is very easy to follow—for a person who is in the trade. It would still be of some help, but not as helpful, to someone fresh out of school. There needs to be a bit more explanation or perhaps examples—either on the workplace competency profile or in the other information. (Apprentice – senior: #3)
- The language is easy to understand now but I may have needed some explanation when I was straight out of school. (Apprentice – senior: #2)
- The metals competency standards are quite difficult to understand . The *Philips* competency standards require a lot of reading. However, the sample workplace competency profile is only one page and easy to interpret. (Employee: #1)

10.6 How would you use a workplace competency profile like the sample?

For this question, a set of four suggested uses was included. They were:

- planning study or other training in preparation for entry to the workforce
- planning study or other training for your present employment
- determining your suitability for a particular job

- preparing a job application or preparing for a job interview

Interviewees were invited to select any number of the suggested uses and to add others if they wished. Table 10.6.1 shows how the interviewees responded.

Table 10.6.1: How the sample workplace competency profile would be used

	Planning study for entry to the workforce	Planning study for your present employment	Determining suitability for a job	Preparing a job application or preparing for a job interview	TOTAL
Apprentice:					
third year	2	2	1	1	6
fourth year	1	1	2	2	6
Experienced employee		1	1		2
TOTAL	3	4	4	3	14

As the table shows, there were no strong trends in the pattern of responses. No interviewees suggested additional uses.

10.7 What parts of the sample workplace competency profile would be most useful? Can you suggest ways in which it could be made more useful?

Once again, the focus of these questions was shifted to the sample workplace competency profile because interviewees had not seen any other profiles. Only a few noteworthy comments were received:

- The performance requirements on the right-hand side are the most useful part. *Attitudinal aspects* [number 8 on the sample profile] and work *independently* [number 9] could benefit from having some indication of how they would apply to the work. (Apprentice – senior: #2)
- All are useful. They are all things you should know. Numbers 1 to 7 [the key competencies on the sample workplace competency profile] would be the most important. Maybe visually separate the three groups out a bit more in the sample. (Apprentice – senior: #5)
- [Workplace competency profiles] should be more widely available and cover more jobs, particularly for school leavers. (Apprentice – senior: #3)

11 Appendices

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11.1 Issues paper for focus groups

Issues and procedures

Issues and procedures

Project aims

A To investigate the need for systems which identify workplace competency profiles from the point of view of industry, individuals, training providers, industry training advisory bodies and state/territory training authorities.

B To investigate how those involved in the training market should deal with the relationship between training and indicators of workplace competence.

C To investigate what influences employees, trainees and students to seek various training options, qualifications and experience.

D To determine the extent of the relationship between indicators of workplace competence and trainees' influences and whether there are any signs of change in the relationship.

This investigation

For the purpose of this investigation a *workplace competency profile* is defined as a set of competencies required for a particular occupation (in an industry) or job (in an enterprise). Put more simply, a workplace competency profile relates to performance in the workplace, it defines what an employer expects an employee to be able to do in a particular job.

The competencies which make up a workplace competency profile are defined in terms of units of competence, usually consisting of various elements of competence, coupled with performance criteria which specify the levels of performance which must be met. Possession of a particular competency by an individual requires that they have specific knowledge, skills and attitudes — these are the things that are actually measured in assessing a person's competence.

Workplace competency profiles can serve several related purposes:

- they can assist individuals in self assessing their suitability for a particular job by comparing their competencies (comprising knowledge, skills and attitudes) with those required for the job
- they can assist individuals in planning their education and training to meet the requirements of the types of employment they will be seeking
- they can assist training providers in designing educational and vocational training programs to meet the needs of the workplace
- they can assist employers in allocating tasks in the workplace or in selecting suitable employees for a particular job by enabling them to match individuals' knowledge, skills and attitudes with those required for the task or job.

But workplace competency profiles can only do these things if they are valid indicators of workplace competence and they can be usefully applied for the above purposes.

This investigation sets out to determine the validity and usefulness of existing workplace competency profiles for the purposes described above, from the perspectives of industry (the workplace), the individual (employees, trainees, students and also unions) and those involved in training (training providers, industry training advisory bodies and state/territory training authorities).

Where (or if) existing workplace competency profiles are found to be lacking either in validity or usefulness for any of these groups, the investigation will seek ways in which these attributes can be improved.

Figure 1 is a diagrammatic representation of the proposed research structure.

The investigation will initially focus on one industry so as to allow the various issues raised to be investigated in depth. The electrical industry has been chosen because it is seen to be a potentially rich source of the information sought. Depending on the extent of information gathered and other project-related issues which may arise, additional industries may subsequently be drawn in to the study.

Major issues

The following are seen to be the major issues to be investigated in this project:

1 How well workplace competency profiles meet the needs of enterprises (employers)

If the workplace competency profile does not meet the needs of the workplace then the concept will be of little value to industry, to training providers or to individuals. It is proposed that enterprises of various sizes across a number of industries be approached to determine:

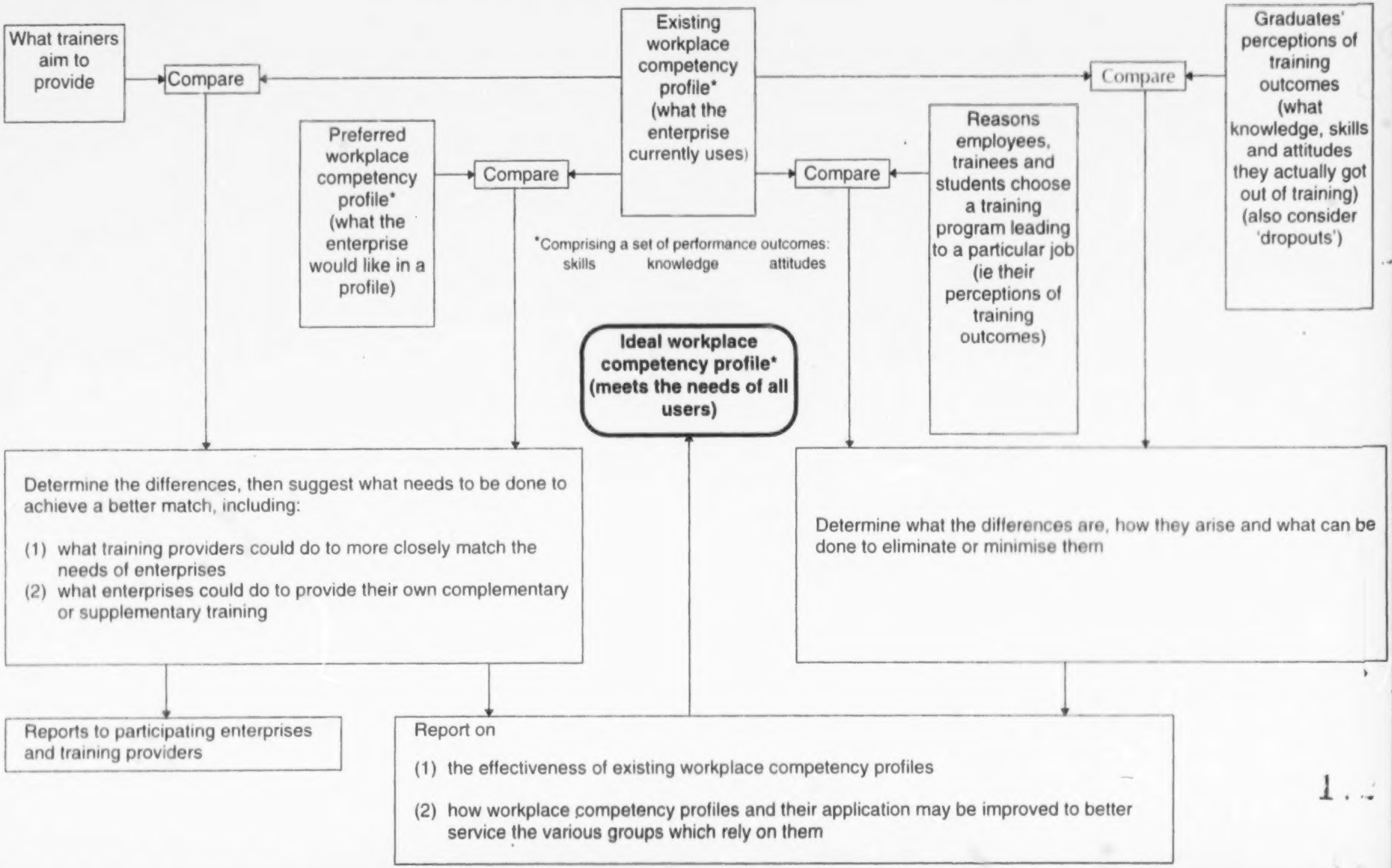
- what the existing workplace competency profiles contain (in most cases this will begin with identification of elements of competence and performance criteria),
- how they are currently being applied in the workplace,
- how workplace competency profiles should ideally be specified and what they should contain in order to be most useful to the workplace.

To provide an enterprise perspective on the relevance of training outcomes to workplace competency profiles, enterprises will also be asked to comment on:

- how well the training received by employees appears to match the workplace competency profiles applicable to their jobs.

INDICATORS OF WORKPLACE COMPETENCE

Figure 1. Diagram of research structure to be followed


What trainers aim to provide
Compare
Existing workplace competency profile* (what the enterprise currently uses)
Compare
Graduates' perceptions of training outcomes (what knowledge, skills and attitudes they actually got out of training) (also consider 'dropouts')
Preferred workplace competency profile* (what the enterprise would like in a profile)
Compare
Compare
Reasons employees, trainees and students choose a training program leading to a particular job (ie their perceptions of training outcomes)
*Comprising a set of performance outcomes: skills knowledge attitudes
Ideal workplace competency profile* (meets the needs of all users)

Determine the differences, then suggest what needs to be done to achieve a better match, including:

(1) what training providers could do to more closely match the needs of enterprises
(2) what enterprises could do to provide their own complementary or supplementary training

Determine what the differences are, how they arise and what can be done to eliminate or minimise them

Reports to participating enterprises and training providers

Report on

(1) the effectiveness of existing workplace competency profiles

(2) how workplace competency profiles and their application may be improved to better service the various groups which rely on them

2 How well workplace competency profiles meet the needs of training providers (and associated bodies and authorities)

Those involved in training should be able to use workplace competency profiles to help design and provide training which meets the needs of the workplace. To determine how well current workplace competency profiles do this and what changes should be considered, training providers, industry training advisory bodies and state/territory training authorities will be approached to determine:

- how training is currently matched to workplace requirements, in particular, whether workplace competency profiles are used, and if so, how they are used,
- how well current training aims actually match workplace competency profiles and, if differences exist, whether there are justifiable reasons for such differences and/or whether there could be any benefit in bringing the two closer together,
- the potential value of workplace competency profiles to the design and provision of training and, in particular, what they would need to contain and how the contents would need to be specified in order for the profiles to be of most use.

3 How well workplace competency profiles meet the needs of employees, trainees and students (and their needs as perceived by unions acting in their interests)

Individuals who are considering applying for a job, or training for one, need guidance as to what the requirements of the job are. Ideally, it would seem that workplace competency profiles would serve this purpose well, but there are almost certainly other factors involved, some of which may not fit neatly into the existing concept of workplace competency profiles. To better understand the relevance of workplace competency profiles to individuals' needs it is proposed that a cross-section of employees, trainees and students, plus unions, be approached to determine:

- what influences individuals to seek particular jobs and training options (or more specifically, what their perceptions of the requirements of the job or the outcomes of the training are).
- how well their perceptions of the job requirements and/or training outcomes match what the workplace competency profiles specify,
- how the content and application of workplace competency profiles should be changed so as to make them of more benefit to individuals in this group.

A distinction will be made between:

- current students/trainees
- graduates
- 'drop-outs' from training (if they can be reached)

as it is anticipated that the perceptions of training outcomes and job requirements by these three groups may change as a result of their experiences during and after training. It is hoped these changes might provide useful insight into how workplace competency profiles might be adapted to better meet their needs.

Related issues

The following are seen to be issues which are also relevant to the aims of this project:

4 Understanding of the concept of workplace competency profile

It is likely that some of the respondents in this investigation will not be fully familiar with the concept of a workplace competency profile or will place a different interpretation on it to that adopted for this investigation. It is therefore intended that the term will be explained to every respondent prior to discussion, interview or collection of information.

5 Content of workplace competency profiles

The content of workplace competency profiles will be considered. For example: how generic and specific competencies are combined to form a profile; the nature and extent of generic (or core) competencies; and the nature and extent of specific competencies (such as whether they are industry, occupation or enterprise specific).

6 Key competencies

The eight key (or core) competencies:

- collecting, analysing and organising information
- communicating ideas and information
- planning and organising activities
- working with others in teams
- using mathematical ideas and techniques
- solving problems
- (using) cultural understandings

are often proposed as being essential to competent work performance. However it is thought they are often not directly specified in workplace competency profiles because they are 'embedded' in the other competencies. The investigation will endeavour to determine their importance to workplace competency profiles and, where they are deemed important, how they should be incorporated in them.

7 Nature of workplace competency profiles

As the mobility of the workforce increases (both by choice and necessity) the portability of competencies assumes increasing importance. This raises questions about the nature of workplace competency profiles: are they broad and applicable to the same type of job with almost any employer in a particular field, or are they narrow and specialised and therefore only relevant to a small range of jobs or a few employers? What are the advantages of each type? Is there anything that might be done to help

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employers, employees and training providers cope with these different ways of specifying workplace competency profiles?

8 Grading of competence

Various schemes for grading competence have been proposed or put into practice.

Such schemes have important implications for workplace competency profiles. The opinions of all respondents/participants will be sought regarding the usefulness of such a concept, how workable it would be and, if used, what form it should take and how it should be applied.

9 Attitudinal aspects of competency

Employers are said to be vitally interested in attitudinal aspects of competency (such as initiative, thoroughness, honesty, perseverance, conscientiousness). The investigation will set out to confirm whether this is the case and if so:

- what attitudinal concepts or components of attitude are relevant
- how important they are to workplace competency profiles
- how they should be specified and reported so as to avoid vagueness and misunderstanding

10 Perceived importance of components of workplace competency profiles

Even where they agree on the content of workplace competency profiles, it is probable that the three groups of respondents, namely:

- enterprises (employers)
- training providers (and associated bodies and authorities)
- employees, trainees and students (plus unions acting in their interests)

will attach different levels of importance to the various components of workplace competency profiles. Any such differences are important to an understanding of how workplace competency profiles should be constructed and applied.

It is hoped that it may be possible to assess the existence and extent of some of these differences by listing some examples of competency components, including types of knowledge, particular skills and attitudes, and special attributes (e.g. contingency management, decision making, time management and creativity), and asking respondents to rank each type of component from 1 to 5 as an indication of its importance.

11.2 Interviewee materials

Information for interviewees

More about workplace competency profiles

Sample workplace competency profile

Telephone survey guides (questionnaires)

Information for interviewees

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed by telephone for our project *Indicators of workplace competency* which looks at the role of workplace competency profiles in the electrical industry.

Your interview is part of a survey of training institutions and other organisations catering for the electrical industry to find out:

- how workplace competency profiles are currently used, or could be used, by personnel involved in training including: curriculum designers, training program managers and teachers in private and government funded training organisations, industry training advisory boards and unions,
- how useful they are in the way they are currently being applied, or how useful they could be,
- what changes could be introduced to make them more useful.

Employers, training providers, employees/trainees and various bodies associated with the electrical industry are all being interviewed to obtain their views on these matters. If you are an employer or training provider we would like to interview one or more of your employees or trainees if this can be arranged (a copy of the questions we would like to ask employees and trainees is enclosed).

Because the survey information is obtained through telephone interview there is no need for you to fill out any forms or post anything back to us. However we would like to offer a few suggestions which you might find helpful:

- Accompanying this letter is:

  (1) some general information about workplace competency profiles

  (2) a sample profile (for electrical mechanic)

  (3) a numbered list of topics we would like to discuss in the telephone interview.

  If you could read this material and perhaps make a few notes before the telephone interview it may help you remember things during our conversation and should reduce the time we need to spend on the telephone. Any real examples you can include to illustrate you answers would be greatly appreciated.

- You will notice some items provide for a 'tick in the box' response. If you would like to tick the boxes beforehand as part of your note-taking we can quickly run through these responses in the first couple of minutes of the interview and so save some time.
- If you have not used formally documented workplace competency profiles, don't worry, our telephone discussion will instead focus on the sample workplace competency profile provided. Please keep it handy for reference during the interview.

More about workplace competency profiles

To perform a work task a person must have:

- knowledge about the task and how to do it
- the skills to actually perform the task
- personal attributes, such as initiative and commitment, needed to perform the task satisfactorily

A suitable combination of these three things will enable the person to perform a particular task in a competent manner. This combination of knowledge skills and attributes is referred to as a competency. When a person has the required knowledge skills and attributes they are said to possess that competency.

Individual competencies are usually referred to as *units* of competence. To make them easier to apply, each unit is broken down into *elements* of competence with accompanying *performance criteria*. *Range statements* and *evidence guides* may also be provided to help explain how these concepts should be used. The diagram over the page shows how they go together to make up a unit of competence and how units of competence combine to make up a job.

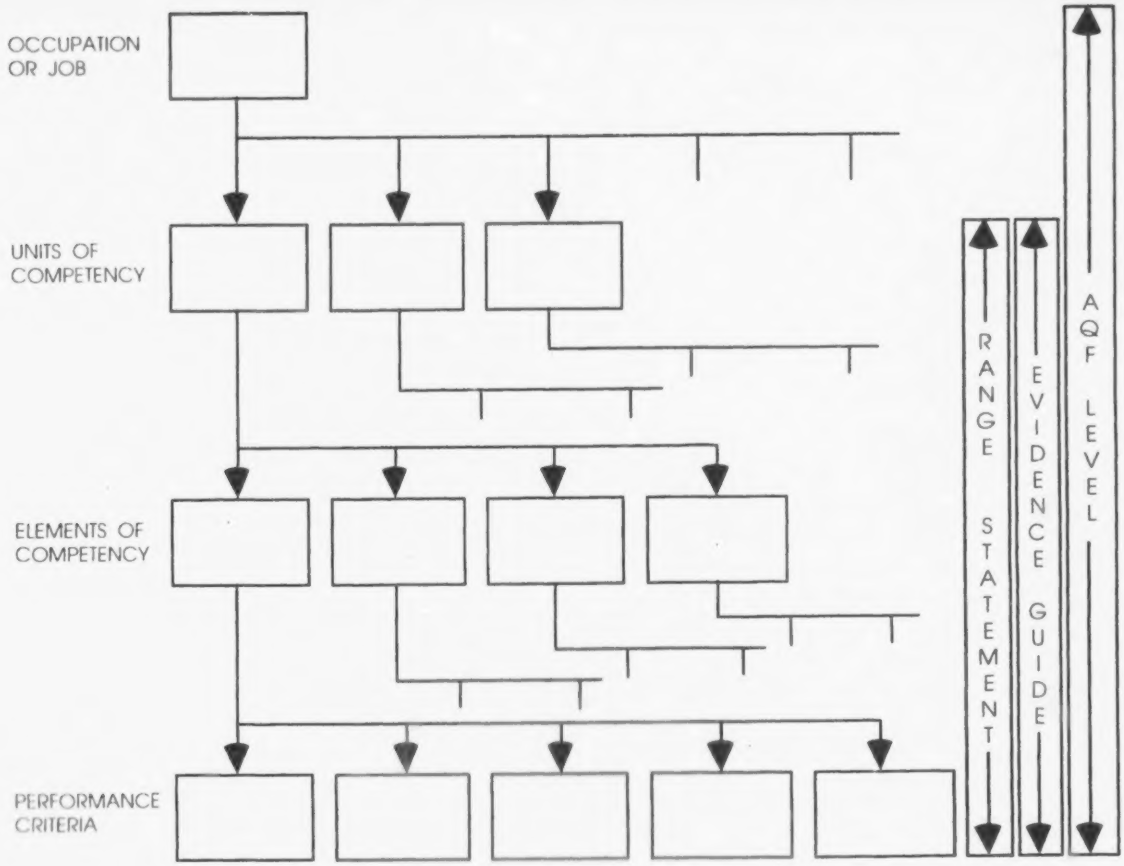
Workplace competency profile is a term used to identify a set of competencies required for a particular job (in an enterprise) or occupation (in an industry). It defines the knowledge, skills and personal attributes an employer expects an employee to have so as to be able to do a particular job.

A workplace competency profile may be formally stated on paper or it may be much more informal — like a series of requirements to be covered in interviews for a job, or perhaps just the requirements specified in a job advertisement.

The sample profile for an electrical mechanic, provided on an accompanying sheet, is an example of a relatively concise profile based on core (or key) competencies (numbers 1 to 7 in the profile), attitudinal competencies (numbers 8 and 9) and technical competencies (numbers 10 to 19).

Workplace competency profiles can serve various purposes. For example they may be used to:

- assist employers in allocating tasks in the workplace or in selecting suitable applicants for a job by enabling them to match individuals' knowledge, skills and attributes with those required for the task or job,
- assist individuals in assessing their suitability for a particular job by comparing their competencies (comprising knowledge, skills and attributes) with those required for the job,
- assist individuals in planning their education and training to meet the requirements of the types of employment they will be seeking
- assist training providers in designing educational and vocational training programs to meet the needs of the workplace


OCCUPATION OR JOB
UNITS OF COMPETENCY
ELEMENTS OF COMPETENCY
PERFORMANCE CRITERIA
RANGE STATEMENT
EVIDENCE GUIDE
AQF LEVEL

Sample workplace competency profile

ELECTRICAL MECHANIC

	Competency	Performance requirements
1	**Communicate clearly and effectively in the workplace**	Understand oral and written instructions and, where necessary, relay them clearly to others. Report clearly (orally or in writing) on job progress, difficulties encountered, special action taken. Communicate effectively and courteously with customers regarding the work being performed.
2	**Perform workplace calculations**	Perform routine workplace calculations such as determination of maximum demand, length of cable run, cable size, type/size of switch or fuse, and estimation of voltage drop.
3	**Cultural understanding**	Respect the rights and views of co-workers and customers from other cultures.
4	**Work with others as part of a team**	Work cooperatively with others by accepting decisions of the work group, sharing work tasks and taking responsibility for particular aspects of the work.
5	**Plan and organise routine work**	Determine types and quantities of materials required. Ensure necessary materials and tools are on hand when required. Schedule work tasks so as to complete jobs efficiently.
6	**Collect, organise and analyse information**	Gather and organise work-related information and maintain work records. Interpret manuals, technical information, plans, drawings, codes of practice, job specifications, electrical standards and quality assurance requirements.
7	**Awareness of, and ability to use, up-to-date technology**	Be aware of currently available technological equipment, materials and processes and apply them appropriately on the job. (e.g residual current devices)
8	**Work independently**	Work independently and reliably with little or no supervision, when necessary.
9	**Use initiative**	Develop and implement own strategies to deal with problems as they arise.
10	**Occupational Health and Safety**	Understand and apply all relevant OH&S codes of practice and procedures including: hazard and risk assessment, responsibility for duty of care, isolation procedures.
11	**Diagnose faults in apparatus and associated basic circuits**	Diagnose faults in apparatus and associated basic circuits[1] including wiring, piping, ducting, components, controls, appliances (single and three phase) and lighting.
12	**Repair faults in apparatus and associated basic circuits**	Repair faults in apparatus and associated basic circuits[1] including wiring, piping, ducting, components, controls, appliances (single and three phase) and lighting.
13	**Transport and handle electrical materials**	Transport and handle electrical tools, materials and equipment safely and efficiently — both to and from the job, and on the worksite.
14	**Assemble, work from, and dismantle scaffolding**	Assemble, work from, and dismantle the various types of scaffolding used in the electrical industry to gain access to electrical equipment, Understand and follow relevant OH&S procedures and codes of practice, particularly regarding proximity of power lines and working at heights.
15	**Install wiring enclosures, cable support systems, cables and accessories**	Install wiring systems including cables, enclosures and accessories[2] for power, measurement, control and communications.
16	**Install and connect fixed wired electrical apparatus.**	Install and connect fixed wired single-phase and three-phase apparatus, including supply, controls, and appliances and lighting.

17	**Test apparatus and associated basic circuits**	Test apparatus and associated basic circuits[1] and components to ensure safety and integrity. Apparatus to include supply, controls, and appliances (single-phase and three-phase) and lighting.
18	**Undertake commissioning procedures**	Undertake commissioning procedures of apparatus and associated basic circuits[1] and components to comply with predetermined parameters. Apparatus to include supply, controls, and appliances (single-phase and three-phase) and lighting.
19	**Maintain apparatus and associated basic circuits**	Undertake routine maintenance of apparatus and associated basic circuits including wiring, piping, ducting, components, controls, appliances (single and three phase) and lighting.

1 basic circuit: a single circuit with a single outlet which may be controlled by one or more devices.

2 accessories include: switches, fuses, plugs, lamp holders, adapters and ceiling roses.

Telephone survey guides

EMPLOYERS

What is a workplace competency profile?

Workplace competency profile is a term which describes the set of competencies required for a particular job or occupation – that is, the combination of knowledge, skills and personal characteristics needed to do the job. Put more simply: **a workplace competency profile defines what an employer expects an employee to be able to do in a particular job**.

If you would like to read more about workplace competency profiles before going any further you will find some additional explanation on a separate sheet plus a sample of a workplace competency profile for an electrical mechanic. It will be helpful if you can read through the sample profile and keep it handy because we would like to refer to it during the telephone interview, particularly if you do not use any formally stated workplace competency profiles in your organisation.

Survey topics

The following is a guide to the topics we wish to cover in our telephone interview. If you would like to obtain clarification or discuss them before the interview please contact John Saunders at NCVER [Tel: (08) 8333 8451 Fax: (08) 8331 9211]

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1 Workplace competency profiles used

1.1 Are workplace competency profiles your company uses specifically stated as workplace competency profiles, job descriptions, etc. or are they recorded less formally than this?

1.2 What jobs involving electrical work do they cover?

1.3 Who uses them and how are they used?

2 Match to industry competency standards

2.1 How closely do your workplace competency profiles relate to current industry competency standards?

A Hardly at all	B A little	C Fairly well	D Very closely	E Almost exactly	F Unable to say

2.2 Are there any parts of your workplace competency profiles which set higher requirements than those stated in the relevant industry competency standards?

2.3 Are there any areas of the relevant industry competency standards, which your workplace competency profiles do not fully cover?

3 Match of existing workplace competency profiles to company requirements

3.1 How closely do the current workplace competency profiles you are using match what the employees are actually required to do in your workplace?

A. Hardly at all	B. A little	C. Fairly well	D. Very closely	E. Almost exactly	F. Unable to say

3.2 How could the match be improved?

4 Relevance of workplace competency profiles to other workplaces

4.1 How much of the content of the workplace competency profiles you are using is relevant to other workplaces *in your sector* of the electrical industry? (e.g. in the electrical contracting sector if you are in electrical contracting, refrigeration sector if you are in refrigeration, etc.)

A. Hardly any of the profile content is relevant.	B. A small amount of the profile content is relevant.	C. About half of the profile content is relevant.	D. A large amount of the profile content is relevant.	E. Almost all of the profile content is relevant.	F. Unable to say

4.2 Some people feel that *company-based* workplace competency profiles (in comparison with *industry-based* ones) tend to be fairly job-specific. Employees who train to meet the requirements of a company based workplace competency profile may therefore lack generic training and experience, thus limiting their prospects of employment outside their current workplace. How much do you agree with this?

A. Strongly disagree	B. Disagree	C. Neutral	D. Agree	E. Strongly agree	F. Unable to say

4.3 If you compare the workplace competency profiles you use with the sample profile, what are the main similarities and differences in the way they are structured or stated?

5 Use of workplace competency profiles in selection of new employees and allocation of work tasks to employees

5.1 How useful do you think workplace competency profiles are (or could be) for selecting applicants for employment by your company? (i.e. by using a workplace competency profile as a benchmark against which applicants' competencies are matched)

A. No use at all	B. A little use	C. Moderately useful	D. Very useful	E. Extremely useful	F. Unable to say

5.2 How useful do you think workplace competency profiles are (or could be) for helping allocate work-tasks and jobs to the most suitable employees (by matching relevant workplace competency profile requirements against employees' competencies)?

A. No use at all	B. A little use	C. Moderately useful	D. Very useful	E. Extremely useful	F. Unable to say

6 Use of workplace competency profiles in workplace training

6.1 How useful do you think workplace competency profiles are (or could be) in the designing and implementing workplace training? (e.g. analysing training needs of employees, matching training to job requirements)

A. No use at all	B. A little use	C. Moderately useful	D. Very useful	E. Extremely useful	F. Unable to say

7 Use of workplace competency profiles in workplace assessment

7.1 How useful do you think workplace competency profiles are (or could be) as a benchmark to assist in assessing a person's competence in the workplace? (e.g. as a basis for assessing whether an employee's competencies meet the requirements of the job)

A. No use at all	B. A little use	C. Moderately useful	D. Very useful	E. Extremely useful	F. Unable to say

8 Core competencies

8.1 The eight core competencies (also referred to as key competencies) listed below are often proposed as being essential to competent work performance.

A collecting, analysing and organising information
B communicating ideas and information
C planning and organising activities
D working with others in teams
E using mathematical ideas and techniques
F solving problems
G using technology
H (using) cultural understandings

Should they be specifically stated in workplace competency profiles or are they part of other competencies and need not be separately mentioned?

9 Attitudinal aspects of competency

9.1 Many employers are concerned about attitudinal aspects of competency such as *initiative, responsibility, commitment, enthusiasm, pleasant personality, punctuality, ability to work reliably with minimal supervision*, etc. Should they be specified in workplace competency profiles?

10 Relative importance of competencies in profiles

10.1 Does your company see some competencies in the workplace competency profiles as more important than others? (e.g. are there some competencies which **must** be held and kept up-to-date if a person is to be regarded as competent). When thinking about your answer to this question you might like to refer to the sample profile provided. You could also consider core competencies and attitudes which were the subjects of the two previous questions.

11 Grading of competence

11.1 Should workplace competency profiles include reference to grades of competence, such as:

- Not competent
- Competent
- Competent with merit
- Competent with distinction thus making it possible for a company to specify levels of competencies for particular jobs?

12 Relationship between workplace competency profiles and licensing

12.1 Is possession of a relevant licence (e.g. electrical worker—unrestricted, Austel or security) a good enough indicator of a person's competence to perform work—or does work in the industry normally require a broader set of competencies such as those which could be specified in a workplace competency profile? Can workplace competency profiles play any complementary role to licences?

A. Licences alone are usually enough.	B. Licences are almost enough. Matching to w/c profiles could also help.	C. Licences are not enough. Matching to w/c profiles is highly desirable	D. Licences are certainly not enough. Matching to w/c profiles should be essential.	E. Unable to say

12.2 If workplace competency profiles are a useful complement to licences what additional things should they cover? (i.e. what do the licences miss?)

13 Relationship between workplace competency profiles and formal off-job training

13.1 Formal off-job training for which certificates, diplomas, etc. are awarded is provided by TAFE and other training providers. How good are qualifications such as certificates or diplomas as indicators of a person's competence on the job?

A. Excellent indicators of competence on the job.	B. Good indicators of competence on the job.	C. Fair indicators of competence on the job.	D. Poor indicators of competence on the job.	E. Unable to say

13.2 Should qualifications be specified as part of a workplace competency profile? If so, does anything else need to be specified?

14 Your special comments

We would like to hear any other comments you have, particularly regarding:

- what an ideal workplace competency profile should contain,
- any special benefits of using workplace competency profiles in your industry,
- any special problems associated with using workplace competency profiles in your industry,
- any other issues concerning workplace competency profiles in the electrical industry which we may have overlooked.

Thank you

Thank you for your time spent in responding to this survey. We hope the project outcomes will lead to better understanding and use of workplace competency profiles in industry and training. Your contribution to the project is sincerely appreciated.

What is a workplace competency profile?

Workplace competency profile is a term which describes the set of competencies required for a particular job or occupation – that is, the combination of knowledge, skills and personal characteristics needed to do the job. Put more simply: **a workplace competency profile defines what an employer expects an employee to be able to do in a particular job**.

If you would like to read more about workplace competency profiles before going any further you will find some additional explanation on a separate sheet plus a sample of a workplace competency profile for an electrical mechanic. It will be helpful if you can read through the sample profile and keep it handy because we would like to refer to it during the telephone interview, particularly if you do not use any formally stated workplace competency profiles in your organisation.

Survey topics

The following is a guide to the topics we wish to cover in our telephone interview. If you would like to obtain clarification or discuss them before the interview please contact John Saunders at NCVER [Tel: (08) 8333 8451 Fax: (08) 8331 9211]

1 Format of workplace competency profiles

1.1 How easy do you think workplace competency profiles (including the sample profile provided) are to understand and use?

2. Very easy	3. Easy	4. Moderately easy	5. Hard	6. Very hard	7. Unable to say

1.2 What can be done to make them more understandable and useful? For example should there be variations in the way workplace competency profiles are stated so as to suit different groups who use them (such as training providers, employees, career counsellors, etc.)?

2 Use of workplace competency profiles in the institution/organisation

Does your institution or organisation use (or could it use) workplace competency profiles to assist in any of the following?

2.1 developing curriculums

2.2 analysing workplace training needs

2.3 selecting training modules to meet industry or employer requirements

2.4 as a benchmark against which trainee performance may be monitored (i.e. against which competence may be assessed). This could include Recognition of Prior Learning

2.5 other (please describe)

For each purpose just listed, could you:

- use the scale below to indicate how useful workplace competency profiles are (or could be)

A. No use at all	B. A little use	C. Moderately useful	D. Very useful	E. Extremely useful	F. Unable to say

- explain how they are (or could be) used
- describe possible difficulties involved in their use

3 How closely do your curricula and training programs match relevant workplace competency profiles?

A. Hardly at all	B. A little	C. Fairly well	D. Quite closely	E. Almost exactly	F. Unable to say

3.1 In which areas does the curriculum exceed workplace competency profile requirements? (e.g. commissioning new installations, OH&S, etc.)

3.2 Are there any areas in workplace competency profiles which are not addressed by the curriculum? If so, which areas and why are they not addressed?

3.3 Should there be any effort to reduce the discrepancies? If so, how should it be done?

4 Enterprise-based workplace competency profiles

4.1 Workplace competency profiles may not always exactly match industry competency standards—employers may possibly omit some competencies which they feel are not relevant to their company or may extend existing industry recognised competencies or add new ones. How should training providers deal with enterprise-based workplace competency profiles which differ from industry competency standards?

5 Value of workplace competency profiles to the individual

5.1 Some people feel that *company*-based workplace competency profiles (in comparison with *industry* based ones) tend to be fairly job-specific. Employees who train to meet the requirements of a company-based workplace competency profile may therefore lack generic training and experience, thus limiting their prospects of employment outside their current workplace. How much do you agree with this?

A Strongly disagree	B Disagree	C Neutral	D Agree	E Strongly agree	F Unable to say

5.2 If you do agree: can you suggest any strategies to deal with the problem?

6 Core competencies

6.1 The eight core competencies (also referred to as key competencies) listed below are often proposed as being essential to competent work performance.

A collecting, analysing and organising information
B communicating ideas and information
C planning and organising activities
D working with others in teams
E using mathematical ideas and techniques
F solving problems
G using technology
H (using) cultural understandings

Should they be specifically stated in workplace competency profiles or are they part of other competencies and need not be separately mentioned?

7 Attitudinal aspects of competency

7.1 Many employers and trainers are concerned about attitudinal aspects of competency such as *initiative, responsibility, commitment, enthusiasm, pleasant personality, punctuality, ability to work reliably with minimal supervision*, etc. Should they be specified in workplace competency profiles?

7.2 Can you suggest any others which should be included?

7.3 Which attitudinal concepts or components of attitude are most relevant to your training aims? How important are they in comparison with the other 'technical' competencies?

8 Relative importance of competencies in profiles

8.1 Does your institution or organisation see some competencies in the workplace competency profiles as more important than others? (e.g. are there some

competencies which **must** be held and kept up-to-date if a person is to be regarded as competent)
[When thinking about your answer to this question you might like to refer to the sample profile provided. You could also consider core competencies and attitudes which were the subjects of the two previous questions.]

If you think some competencies are more important than others, can you…

8.2 identify any competencies in the workplace competency profiles which are regarded as *critically important* (e.g. which must be possessed and up-to-date if a person is to be regarded as competent).

8.3 give examples of other competencies in the workplace competency profiles which are important but not critical (e.g. competencies which need not be up-to-date and can be 'brushed up' when they are needed).

8.4 give examples of any competencies contained in the workplace competency profiles which are of low importance (e.g. competencies which are 'handy to have' but not essential for a person to function adequately in a job).

9 Grading of competence

9.1 Should workplace competency profiles include reference to grades of competence, such as:

- Not competent
- Competent
- Competent with merit
- Competent with distinction

thus making it possible for a company to specify levels of competencies for particular jobs?

Could you explain the reasons for your answer.

10 Relationship between workplace competency profiles and licensing

10.1 Is possession of a relevant licence (such as for unrestricted electrical worker, Austel or security) a good enough indicator of a person's competence to perform work — or does work in the industry normally require a broader set of competencies such as those which could be specified in a workplace competency profile? Can workplace competency profiles play any complementary role to licences?

A. Licences alone are usually enough	B. Licences are almost enough. Matching to w/c profiles could also use.	C. Licences are not enough. Matching to w/c profiles is highly desirable.	D. Licences are certainly not enough. Matching to w/c profiles should be essential.	E. Unable to say

10.2 If workplace competency profiles are a useful complement to licences what additional things should they cover? (i.e. what do the licences miss?)

11 Relationship between workplace competency profiles and formal off-job training

11.1 Formal off-job training for which certificates, diplomas, etc. are awarded is provided by TAFE and other training providers. How good are qualifications such as certificates or diplomas as indicators of a person's competence on the job?

A. Excellent indicators of competence on the job.	B. Good indicators of competence on the job.	C. Fair indicators of competence on the job.	D. Poor indicators of competence on the job.	E. Unable to say

11.2 Should qualifications be specified as part of a workplace competency profile?

11.3 If they are specified, what sorts of competencies, if any, should also be included (to cover things the certificates or diplomas miss)?

Thank you

Thank you for your time spent in responding to this survey. We hope the project outcomes will lead to better understanding and use of workplace competency profiles in industry and training. Your contribution to the project is sincerely appreciated.

What is a workplace competency profile?

Workplace competency profile is a term which describes the set of competencies required for a particular job or occupation – that is, the combination of knowledge, skills and personal characteristics needed to do the job. Put more simply: **a workplace competency profile defines what an employer expects an employee to be able to do in a particular job**.

If you would like to read more about workplace competency profiles before going any further you will find some additional explanation on a separate sheet plus a sample of a workplace competency profile for an electrical mechanic. It will be helpful if you can read through the sample profile and keep it handy because we would like to refer to it during the telephone interview, particularly if you do not use any formally stated workplace competency profiles in your organisation.

Survey topics

The following is a guide to the topics we wish to cover in our telephone interview. If you would like to obtain clarification or discuss them before the interview please contact John Saunders at NCVER [tel: (08) 8333 8451 fax: (08) 8331 9211]

1 If you are receiving job training, or have received job training during the past 12 months:

1.1 What information about your course or training program were you given before you commenced training?

1.2 How does it compare with a workplace competency profile—like the sample profile included with this survey material?

1.3 What did it lead you to expect your training outcomes to be—and how closely did these expected training outcomes match the actual outcomes?

2 If, during the past 12 months, you have changed employers or changed jobs with your current employer:

2.1 What information about your new job were you given before you commenced employment in it?

2.2 How does it compare with a workplace competency profile—like the sample profile included with this survey material?

2.3 What did it lead you to expect you would be doing in the job—and how closely did this match the actual job?

3 Application of workplace competency profiles

3.1 Where did you get the workplace competency profile you have used?

3.2 What was it called?

4 How easy are workplace competency profiles to understand?

4.1 How easy to follow was the format of the workplace competency profile you used (i.e. the way it was set out)?

A. Very easy	B. Easy	C. Moderately easy	D. Hard	E. Very hard	F. Unable to say

4.2 How easy to understand was the language and terminology of the workplace competency profile you used?

A. Very easy	B. Easy	C. Moderately easy	D. Hard	E. Very hard	F. Unable to say

4.3 Can you suggest any ways in which workplace competency profiles could be made easier to understand?

5 Use of workplace competency profiles

5.1 Describe how you used a workplace competency profile (or would use one like the sample). Was it for:

A ☐ planning study or other training in preparation for entry to the workforce,

B ☐ planning study or other training for your present employment,

C ☐ determining your suitability for a particular job or type of job,

D ☐ preparing a job application or preparing for a job interview,

E ☐ other? (please describe)

5.2 What parts of the workplace competency profile were (or would be) most useful? Why were they particularly useful?

5.3 What parts were (or would be) least useful? Was it because they were:

A ☐ poorly set out,

B ☐ poorly explained,

C ☐ contained insufficient information,

D ☐ irrelevant, or

E ☐ other? (please describe)

5.4 Can you suggest any ways in which workplace competency profiles could be made more useful?

6 Importance of training outcomes—Trainee/apprentice/student

(Answer this question only if you are currently undertaking training as a trainee, apprentice or vocational education student)

6.1 What were your reasons for choosing the training program you are now undertaking? In particular what important skills, knowledge and attitudes do you think successful completion of training will give you? Please briefly describe them and estimate the relative importance of each to the job using the following scale:

A. Minor importance	B. Moderately important	C. Important	D. Highly important	E. Absolutely essential	F. Unable to say

7 Importance of training outcomes—Employed graduate

(Answer this question only if you have completed a program of vocational training and are now employed (or have been employed) in a job relevant to your training)

7.1 What are the major skills, knowledge and attitudes you think your job training has provided? Please briefly describe up to ten of them and estimate the relative importance of each to the job using the following scale:

A. Minor importance	B. Moderately important	C. Important	D. Highly important	E. Absolutely essential	F. Unable to say

Thank you

Thank you for your time spent in responding to this survey. We hope the project outcomes will lead to better understanding and use of workplace competency profiles in industry and training. Your contribution to the project is sincerely appreciated.

11.3 Model competency profiles

Model workplace competency profile

Model employee competency profile

Model workplace competency profile

ELECTRICAL MECHANIC—AQF LEVEL 5

TECHNICAL COMPETENCIES (Level 5)

	COMPETENCY	PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS.
T 1	Occupational Health and Safety.	Understand and apply all relevant OH&S codes of practice and procedures including: hazard and risk assessment, responsibility for duty of care, isolation procedures. *Apply key competencies K 1, K 4, K 7 and attitudinal competency A 2 where appropriate.*
T 2	Install wiring enclosures, cable support systems, cables and accessories.	Install wiring systems including cables, enclosures, supports and accessories for power, measurement, control and communications. *Apply key competencies K 1, K 2, K 4, K 5, K 6, K 7 and attitudinal competencies A 1 and A 2 where appropriate.*
T 3	Install and connect fixed wired electrical apparatus.	Install and connect fixed wired single-phase and three-phase apparatus, including supply, controls, appliances and lighting. *Apply key competencies K 1, K 2, K 4, K 5, K 6, K 7 and attitudinal competencies A 1 and A 2 where appropriate.*
T 4	Test apparatus and associated basic circuits.	Test apparatus and associated basic circuits and components to ensure safety and integrity. Apparatus to include supply, controls, and appliances (single-phase and three-phase) and lighting. *Apply key competencies K 1, K 2, K 5, K 6, K 7 and attitudinal competency A 1 where appropriate.*
T 5	Undertake commissioning procedures.	Undertake commissioning procedures of apparatus and associated basic circuits and components to comply with predetermined parameters. Apparatus to include supply, controls, and appliances (single-phase and three-phase) and lighting. *Apply key competencies K 1, K 2, K 4, K 6, K 7 and attitudinal competency A 1 where appropriate.*
T 6	Maintain apparatus and associated basic circuits.	Undertake routine maintenance of apparatus and associated basic circuits including wiring, cable enclosures, supports, components, controls, appliances (single and three phase) and lighting. *Apply key competencies K 1, K 2, K 3, K 4, K 5, K 6, K 7 and attitudinal competencies A 1 and A 2 where appropriate.*
T 7	Diagnose faults in apparatus and associated basic circuits.	Diagnose faults in apparatus and associated basic circuits including wiring, cable enclosures, supports, components, controls, appliances (single and three phase) and lighting. *Apply key competencies K 1, K 2, K 4, K 6, K 7 and attitudinal competencies A 1 and A 2 where appropriate.*
T 8	Repair faults in apparatus and associated basic circuits.	Repair faults in apparatus and associated basic circuits including wiring, cable enclosures, supports, components, controls, appliances (single and three phase) and lighting. *Apply key competencies K 1, K 2, K 5, K 6, K 7 and attitudinal competencies A 1 and A 2 where appropriate.*
T 9	Transport and handle electrical materials.	Transport and handle electrical tools, materials and equipment safely and efficiently — to and from the job, and on the worksite. *Apply key competencies K 1, K 3, K 5 and attitudinal competencies A 1 and A 2 where appropriate.*
T 10	Assemble, work from, and dismantle scaffolding.	Assemble, work from, and dismantle the various types of scaffolding used in the electrical industry to gain access to electrical equipment, Understand and follow relevant OH&S procedures and codes of practice, particularly regarding proximity of power lines and working at heights. *Apply key competencies K 1, K 3, K 5, K 7, where appropriate.*

ADDITIONAL COMPETENCIES

	COMPETENCY	PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS
T 11	Install, maintain and service explosion-protected equipment and wiring systems.	Install, maintain and service explosion-protected equipment and wiring systems in industrial spray-painting booths (competencies as specified in Electrical Competency Standards: *Electrical Equipment in Hazardous Areas* — Units 3, 4 and 5).
T 12	Knowledge of structure of the company and the services and products offered.	Provide information and/or advise clients on services and products offered by Steinmetz Electrical Services. Refer clients to appropriate company personnel.
T 13	Knowledge of Total Quality Management principles and processes.	Assist the company to achieve its quality assurance goals through application of TQM principles and processes.

KEY COMPETENCIES

(to be incorporated, where applicable, in performance requirements for technical competencies

	COMPETENCY	PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS
K 1	Communicate clearly and effectively in the workplace.	Understand oral and written instructions and, where necessary, relay them clearly to others. Report clearly (orally or in writing) on job progress, difficulties encountered, special action taken. Communicate effectively and courteously with customers regarding the work being performed.
K 2	Perform workplace calculations.	Perform routine workplace calculations such as determination of maximum demand, length of cable run, cable size, type/size of switch or fuse, and estimation of voltage drop.
K 3	Cultural understanding.	Understand and respect the culture of the workplace, including: established workplace procedures and channels of responsibility and communication (both formal and informal). Respect the rights and views of co-workers and customers from other cultures.
K 4	Work with others as part of a team.	Work cooperatively with others by accepting decisions of the work group, sharing work tasks and taking responsibility for particular aspects of the work.
K 5	Plan and organise routine work.	Determine types and quantities of materials required. Ensure necessary materials and tools are on hand when required. Schedule work tasks so as to complete jobs efficiently.
K 6	Collect, organise and analyse information.	Gather and organise work-related information and maintain work records. Interpret manuals, technical information, plans, drawings, codes of practice, job specifications, electrical standards and quality assurance requirements.
K 7	Awareness of, and ability to use, up-to-date technology.	Be aware of currently available technological equipment, materials and processes (e.g. residual current devices) and apply them appropriately on the job.

ATTITUDINAL COMPETENCIES

(to be incorporated, where applicable, in performance requirements for technical competencies)

	COMPETENCY	PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS
A 1	Work independently	Work independently and reliably with little or no supervision when necessary.
A 2	Use initiative	Develop and implement own strategies to deal with problems as they arise.
A 3		
A 4		

RANGE STATEMENTS

(range statements specify the extent of work to which the competencies apply)

R 1	Basic circuit	Basic circuit to include a single circuit with a single outlet which may be controlled by one or more devices.
R 2	Accessories	Accessories to include: switches, fuses, plugs, lamp holders, adaptors and ceiling roses.
R 3	Explosion protected equipment and wiring systems	Explosion protected equipment and wiring systems to include motors, switches, relays, light fittings and armoured cables used where explosive gases may be present.
R 4		
R 5		

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Model employee competency profile

TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS

QUALIFICATION OR TRAINING CREDENTIAL	WHERE OBTAINED (INCLUDING ISSUING BODY)	DATE OBTAINED
Apprenticeship	Apprentice studies at Greenville Institute of TAFE. Apprenticed four years to Edison Electrical Enterprises.	1985 – 88
St John First Aid certificate	St John — Adelaide	1994 – current
Fire safety training	Internal fire safety training course conducted for Greenville Electrical Installations. Certificate awarded by Greenville Fire Services.	1994
PLC Certificate	Greenville Institute of TAFE	1994
Installation of explosion-protected equipment and wiring systems (Unit 3B)	Greenville Institute of TAFE	1996
Course: *Servicing Series J appliances*	General Appliance Corporation	1994
Heavy vehicle driver licence	Department of Transport – South Australia	1983 – current

TECHNICAL COMPETENCIES (Level 5)

COMPETENCY	EXAMPLES OF APPARATUS AND NATURE OF WORK PLUS EXPERIENCE
Occupational Health and Safety.	First aid certificate has been kept up to date with refresher courses. Internal fire safety training course (1994).
Install wiring enclosures, cable support systems, cables and accessories.	Installations for low voltage single and three phase supply, controls, appliances and lighting in domestic and commercial applications — Edison Electrical Enterprises (1985-88) and Greenville Electrical Installations (1989-94). Products installed include: [names of products]. Installation of commercial process control equipment — B Franklin & Co (1995-97). Products installed include: [names of products]. Installation of cables and accessories for hazardous commercial locations — B Franklin & Co (1995-97). Products installed include: [names of products].
Install and connect fixed wired electrical apparatus.	Installation of low voltage single and three phase fixed wired apparatus in domestic and commercial premises 1985-97, including: [names of products]. Installation of commercial low voltage process control apparatus — B Franklin & Co (1995-97). Products installed include: [names of products]. Installation of electric motors for hazardous commercial locations — B Franklin & Co (1995-97). Products installed include: [names of products].
Test apparatus and associated basic circuits.	Test low voltage single and three phase fixed wired apparatus in domestic and commercial installations 1985-97, including: [names of products]. Test commercial low voltage process control apparatus — B Franklin & Co (1995-97). Test apparatus and circuits installed hazardous commercial locations — B Franklin & Co (1995-97).
Undertake commissioning procedures.	Basic training received as part of apprenticeship course, plus on-going experience.
Maintain apparatus and associated basic circuits.	Responsible for periodic maintenance of low voltage single and three phase fixed wired apparatus in domestic and commercial installations — Greenville Electrical Installations (1989-94)
Diagnose faults in apparatus and associated basic circuits.	General diagnosis as part of routine work, 1989-97. Was company specialist in diagnosis of General Appliance Corporation products and installations for Greenville Electrical Installations (1989-94).
Repair faults in apparatus and associated basic circuits.	General repairs as part of routine work, 1989-97. Was the company specialist in repair of General Appliance Corporation products and installations for Greenville Electrical Installations (1989-94).

Transport and handle electrical materials.	Transported tools and equipment to and from the workplace as part of work for all employers, 1989-97. Considerable experience driving trucks 1983-88 (Came from a farming background).
Assemble, work from, and dismantle scaffolding.	Awareness only. No formal training

ADDITIONAL COMPETENCIES

COMPETENCY	EXAMPLES OF APPARATUS AND NATURE OF WORK PLUS EXPERIENCE
Installation of wiring enclosures, cable support systems, cables, accessories and equipment in hazardous locations.	Installed explosion-protected equipment and wiring systems in commercial locations subject to explosion hazard — B Franklin & Co (1996-97).

KEY COMPETENCIES

COMPETENCY	NATURE OF WORK PLUS EXPERIENCE
Communicate clearly and effectively in the workplace.	Five years experience as workplace supervisor and foreman requiring communication with management, interpretation of work orders, preparation of written quotes and provision of instructions to employees.
Perform workplace calculations.	Estimation of labour and materials requirements for preparation of quotes.
Cultural understanding.	Experience in both small and large enterprises. Have worked and dealt with people from other cultures.
Work with others as part of a team.	All employment experience has been team-based.
Plan and organise routine work.	Five years experience as workplace supervisor and foreman with two enterprises involving planning jobs and organising the work of other employees.
Collect, organise and analyse information.	See above.
Awareness of, and ability to use, up-to-date technology.	Have attended workshops and seminars on changes to electrical regulations and introduction of new equipment and processes.

ATTITUDINAL COMPETENCIES

COMPETENCY	NATURE OF WORK PLUS EXPERIENCE
Ability to work independently	Much of the work performed prior to employment as supervisor/foreman required me to work alone on the job.
Ability to use initiative	Have developed and implemented improved work procedures and record systems for the last two employers (Greenville Electrical Installations and B Franklin & Co).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Summary of work history:

1985 - 88	Completed four year apprenticeship as Electrical Mechanic with Edison Electrical Enterprises. Mainly involved in low voltage domestic installations, maintenance and servicing.
1989 - 94	Seven years with Greenville Electrical Installations as Electrical Mechanic. Work consisted mainly of low voltage commercial and domestic installations, maintenance and servicing. Employed as workplace supervisor (supervising four licensed electrical workers and two apprentices 1992 - 94.
1995 - 97	Employed with B Franklin & Co. Ltd. Three years on-the-job training and experience in installation, maintenance and servicing of low voltage wiring and equipment in hazardous locations — particularly explosive atmospheres. Employed as foreman 1996 - 97

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